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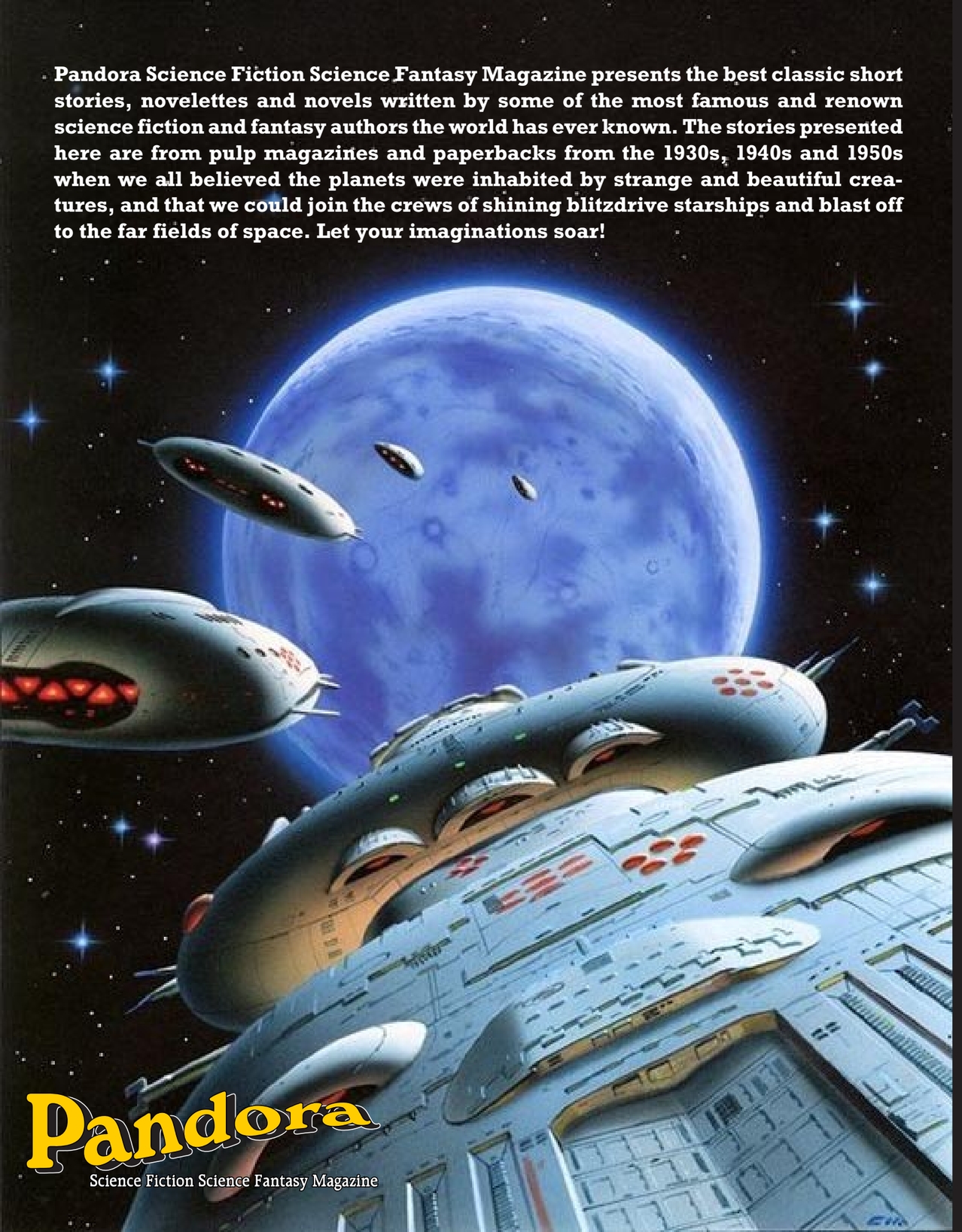

Pandora

Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

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Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

Kerson Publishing Company • 6460-65 Convoy Court • San Diego, California 92117

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## PERFECT CONTROL

*Why can't you go home again after years in space? There had to be an answer ... could he find it in time, though?*

Sitting at his desk, Colonel Halter brought the images on the telescreen into focus. Four booster tugs were fastening, like sky-barnacles, onto the hull of the ancient derelict, *Alpha*.

He watched as they swung her around, stern down, and sank with her through the blackness, toward the bluish-white, moon-lighted arc of Earth a thousand miles below.

He pressed a button. The image of tugs and hull faded and the control room of the old ship swam onto the screen.

Colonel Halter saw the crew, sitting in a half circle, before the control panel.

The telescreen in the control room of old *Alpha* was yet dark. The faces watching it held no care lines or laugh lines, only a vague expression of kindness. They could be faces of wax or those of people dying pleasantly.

Colonel Halter shook his head. Brilliant—the finest space people in the field seventy-five years back—and now he was to get them to come out of that old hull. God almighty, how could you pull people out of an environment they were perfectly adjusted to? Logic? Force? Reason? Humoring? How could you know?

Talk to them, he told himself. He dreaded it, but the problem had to be faced.

He flipped a switch on his desk; saw light jump into their screen and his own face take shape there; saw their faces on his own screen, set now, like the faces of stone idols.

He turned another dial. The picture swung around so that he was looking into their eyes and they into his.

Halter said, "Captain McClelland?"

One of the old men nodded. "Yes."

McClelland was clean-shaven. His uniform, treated against deterioration, was immaculate, but his body showed frail and bony through it. His face was long and hollow-cheeked, the eyes deep-set and bright. The head was like a skull, the nose an eagle's beak.

"I'm Colonel Halter. I'm a psychotherapist."

None of them answered. There was only the faint thrumming of the rockets lowering the old ship to Earth.

"Let me be sure I have your identities right," went on Colonel Halter.

He then looked at the man on the captain's right. "You, I believe, are Lieutenant James Brady."

Brady nodded, his pale, eroded face expressionless.

Colonel Halter saw the neat black uniform, identical with the captain's; saw the cropped gray hair and meticulously trimmed goatee.

"And you," he said to the woman sitting beside the lieutenant, "are Dr. Anna Mueller."

The same nod and thin, expressionless face. The same paleness. Faded hazel eyes; hair white and trimmed close to her head; body emaciated.

"Daniel Carlyle, astrogator."

The nod.

Like the doctor's brother, thought Colonel Halter, and yet like the lieutenant with his cropped hair and with an identical goatee.

"Caroline Gordon, dietician and televisor. John Crowley, rocketman."

Each nodded, expressionless, their faces like white, weathered statues in a desert.

Colonel Halter turned to the captain. The rocket thrum of the tugs had become a roar as the gravity pulled against the antique hull.

"We understand," said Colonel Halter, "that you demand repairs for your ship and fuel enough to take you back into deep space."

"That is right." The voice was low, slightly harsh.

"You're all close to a hundred years old. You'd die out there. Here, with medical aid, you'd easily live to a hundred and twenty-five."

Dr. Anna Mueller's head moved slightly. "We're aware of that, Colonel."

"It'd be pointless," said the colonel, "and a shameful waste. You're still the only crew that ever made it out beyond the Solar System. You've kept records of your personal experience, how you survived. They're valuable."

Dr. Mueller caught her breath. "Our adjustment to space is our private concern. I don't think you could understand."

"Maybe not, but we could try. To *us*, of course, complete adjustment is a

living death."

"To us, it was a matter of staying alive."

Halter turned aside from disagreement, searching for common ground. "You'd be protected here, you know. You deserve that."

"Who'd protect us from you?" asked the captain. "Life in the Solar System is destructive."

Brady, the lieutenant, leaned forward. "You've failed—all through the whole System."

"We haven't finished living in it," said Halter. "Who can pin a label on us of success or failure?"

Miss Gordon, dietician and televisor, said quietly, "There are some records I'd like to show you. We compiled them while the *Alpha* was drifting back into the System."

Halter watched the frail arm reach out and turn a dial.

A point of light grew on the screen in Colonel Halter's office.

"Pluto," said her quiet voice.

Halter watched the lightspot focus on a mountain of ice. Men in suits of steel were crawling up its frozen side. Other men on the mountain's top were sighting guns. The men below were sighting guns. Yellow fire spurted from the top and the sides of the mountain, blending into a lake of fire. There was a great hissing and a rushing torrent of boiling water and rolling, twisting steel-clad bodies. The mountain of ice melted like a lump of lard in a hot frying pan. Only the steel bodies glinted, motionless, in the pale wash of sunlight.

Halter watched the brightness die and another lightspot grow one moon. The focus shifted in close to a fleet of shining silver ships.

Then another fleet dropped from close above, hanging still, and there were blinding flashes engulfing each ship below, one after the other, until there were only the shining ships above, climbing into the dusk glow of the Sun.

The glowing circle of bright-ringed Saturn was already rushing toward Colonel Halter from far back in the depth of screen. The focus shifted onto the planet's glaring surface. Men in the uniform of Earth soldiers were rushing out of transparent shell houses and staring in panic as the missiles plummeted through the shells and erupted clouds of steam which spouted up from mile-deep craters and there was nothing but the steam and the holes and the white cold.

Jupiter made a hole in the blackness, with eleven tiny holes scattered all around her, like droplets of fire. Ships streaked up, one for each droplet, circling each, spraying fire, until each droplet flared like a tiny sun.

Yellow Mars, holding closely its two speedy rocks of moons, spun into the screen.

A straggling line of men moved across a desert that whipped them with sheets of yellow dust. A single ship dived from out of the Sun, swooped along the line, licking it with the tongue of flame that streaked behind. As the ship flashed beyond the horizon, a line of smoking rag bundles lay still upon the yellow sand.

Darkness closed in upon the television screen in Colonel Halter's office. In the long moment of silence that followed, he thought, *Oh, God, after this awful picture, how can I convince them to come out of the womb of that ship and live again? What reason can I give?*

Immobilizing his face, he saw the half circle of the six old people again in the control room of the old, old ship.

He said, "You'll set down in approximately twenty minutes."

"Yes," agreed the captain, "from where we jumped into space seventy-five years ago. The people of Earth were talking about their problems, not killing each other about them. There was hope. We felt that by the time we'd finished our mission and come back from that other solar system, where a healthy colony could be born, most of those problems would be solved." A pause. "But now there's this terrible killing all through the System. We won't face it."

The roaring of the rockets now as they plunged flame against the concrete slab of the landing field. The bug bodies of the tugs gently easing old *Alpha* to Earth.

Colonel Halter was saying, "How about this other solar system? You haven't let us know whether or not you reached it."

"We saw it." There was a hollowness in the captain's voice. "We didn't reach it. But we will. You'll repair the *Alpha* and refuel it."

"As you were saying," prompted Colonel Halter, "you didn't reach it."

"A meteor," said the captain. "Straight into our rockets. Our ship began to drift. The cameras, of course, set in the bulkheads, were watching us."

"May I see? Anything you have to show or say will be strictly between us. I've given orders for our communication to be unrecorded and private. You have my word."

"You'll be allowed to see. I've given my permission."

Colonel Halter thought, *You have given permission?*

Then he saw in his telescreen the little old lady who was Caroline Gordon, dietician and televisor, press a button on the side of her chair. Instantly the picture changed. He heard her voice. "You see the rocket room of the *Alpha* back almost seventy-five years, a few minutes before the accident."

There were the four torpedo-like tubes projecting into the cylindrical room; the mass of levers, buttons, wheels and flashing lightspots.

Halter watched John Crowley, the rocketman, broad-shouldered and lithe,

turning a wheel at the point of one of the giant tubes.

The next moment, he was flung to the floor. He struggled to his feet, jerked an oxygen mask from the bag at his chest, clamped it to his face and rushed to the tubes. He twirled wheels, pulled levers, pressed buttons. He glanced at the board on which the lightspots had been flashing. Darkness. He pressed a button. A foot-thick metal door swung open. He stepped through it. The door shut and locked.

Leaning against the steel wall at the end of a long companionway, he pulled off his oxygen mask and ran along the companionway toward the control room.

The others met him in the center of the ship.

Crowley saluted the young Captain McClelland.

"The rockets are gone, sir. A meteor."

McClelland did not smile or frown, show sadness or fear or any other emotion. He was tall and slim then, with cropped black hair, its line high on his head. His face was lean and strong-featured. There was a sense of command about the captain.

Quietly, he said, "We'll all go to the control room."

They followed him as he strode along the companionway.

The telescreen in Colonel Halter's office darkened and there was only the old voice of the captain, saying, "We were drifting in space. You know what that means. But no one broke down. We were too well trained, too well conditioned. We gathered in the control room."

Light opened up again on Colonel Halter's telescreen. He saw the polished metal walls, the pilot chairs and takeoff hammocks, the levers, buttons and switches of the young ship back those many years, and the six young people standing before a young Captain McClelland, who was speaking to them of food, water and oxygen.

It was decided that their metabolisms must be lowered and that they must live for the most part in their bunks. All activity must be cut to minimum. All weapons must be jettisoned, except one, the captain's shock gun, that could not kill but only cause unconsciousness for twenty-four hours.

Captain McClelland gave an order. The weapons were gathered up and placed in an airlock which thrust them out into space. Five of the crew lay down in their bunks. Dr. Anna Mueller, tall and slim, full-bosomed, tawny-skinned and tawny-haired, remained standing. She pressed the thought recorders over the heads of the other five people who lay there motionless, clamped the tiny electrodes onto her own temples and placed a small, black box, covered with many tiny dials, beside the bunk of Miss Gordon, the televisor.

A moment later, a jumble of thoughts: *Now I am dead. An end. For what, now that it's here? Love. The warm press of a body. Trees and grass. Sunrise. To take*

*poison. Clean air after a rain. City, people, lights. Sunset—*

The thought words jumbled like a voice from a recorder when the speed is turned up.

Then they faded and one thought stream came through clean and clear: *I am Dr. Anna Mueller. Good none of the others can hear what I'm thinking. Was afraid I'd die this way someday. But to prolong it. Painless death in an instant. Could give it to us all. But orders. Captain McClelland. No feeling? Can't he see what I feel for him? Why am I thinking like this? Now. But this is what is happening to me. He'd rather make love to this ship. Kiss Crowley before I give him the metabolism sedation shot. Captain'll see I'm a woman.*

She stepped to the bulkhead and pressed a button. A medicine cabinet opened. After filling a hypodermic syringe, she went to Crowley, bent down and gave him a long kiss on the lips.

Instantly Colonel Halter heard thoughts.

Captain McClelland: *She must be weak. Why's she doing that? Thought she was stronger. But the ship's the thing. The ship and I.*

Crowley: *What the hell? Didn't know she went for me. Just a half hour with her before the needle. What's to lose?* He pulled her down to him.

Lieutenant Brady: *He'd do that, the damned animal. But I'm not enough of an animal. I'm a good spaceman. All spontaneity's been trained out of me. Feel like killing him. And taking her. Anyplace. But I'm so controlled. Got to do something. This last time....* He sat up in his bunk.

Caroline Gordon: *I knew he was like that. Married when we got back. Mrs. Crowley. And if we'd gotten back. Out every other night with another woman. I could kill him.* She turned her face away.

Daniel Carlyle: *Look at them. And I can't live. Only one person needs me, back on Earth, and she's the only. And that's enough. But maybe I can kill myself....* He did not move.

The thoughts stopped and Colonel Halter leaned forward in his chair as he saw Captain McClelland standing beside his bunk, the gun in his hand. Dr. Mueller saw, too—the young Dr. Mueller, back those seventy-five years. She struggled to pull away from Crowley.

Lieutenant Brady stood, started toward the captain, stopped. Crowley pushed Dr. Mueller away from him, leaped to his feet and lunged toward the captain. A stream of light appeared between the gun muzzle and Crowley. He stumbled, caught himself, stood up very straight, then sank down, as though he had been deflated.

The captain motioned Dr. Mueller to her bunk. She hesitated, pain in her face, turned, went to her bunk and lay down. Another stream of light appeared

between her and the gun. She lay very still. The needle slipped from her fingers.

The captain turned the gun on Lieutenant Brady, who was coming at him, arms raised. The light beam again. The lieutenant sank back. Caroline Gordon was watching the captain as the light stream appeared. She relaxed, her eyes closed. Daniel Carlyle did not move as the light touched him.

Captain McClelland holstered the gun. He picked up the hypodermic needle and sterilized it at the medicine cabinet. Then he injected Crowley's arm, filled the hypo four more times, injected the others.

He finally thrust the needle into his own arm and lay down. His breathing began to slow. There was only the control room of the ship now, like some ancient mausoleum, with the six still figures and the control board dark and the eternal ocean of night pressing against the ports.

The picture of the ship's control room began to fade on the screen. After a moment of darkness, the live picture of the six old figures, sitting in their half circle, spread again over the lighted square.

Colonel Halter saw his own image, looking into the old masks.

He said, "And where was *your* weakness, Captain McClelland?"

"I was concerned," said the old voice, "with keeping us alive."

"You weren't aware that some of your crew were emotionally involved with each other?"

"No."

"Are there any more records you could show me?"

"Many more, Colonel, but I don't think it's necessary for you to see them. It would take too long. And we want to get back out into space." He paused. "We can brief you."

"About your going back into space.... I'm not sure we can allow it."

"Our answer's very simple. There's a button, under my thumb, on the arm of this chair. A little pressure. Carbon monoxide. It would be quick."

"Your idea?"

"Yes. A matter of preserving our integrity. We'd rather die than face the horrors of life on Earth."

Halter turned to the semi-circle of faces. "And you've all agreed to this—this suicide?"

The captain cut in. "Of course. I realized years ago that the only place we could live was in space, in this ship."

"When did your crew realize this?"

"After a couple of years. I told them over and over again, day after day. After all, I am captain. I dictate the policy."

"You've come back. You're in port. You're not in complete command."

"I'll always be in command."

"Perhaps," said Halter quietly. "However, we can come back to that. Please brief me on the records."

Captain McClelland's face hardened as he turned to Dr. Anna Mueller.

She explained, "We regained consciousness twenty-four hours after Captain McClelland used the shock gun on us. By then, our metabolisms were high enough to keep us conscious and alive. We could lift nutrition and water capsules to our mouths. We could press the button to activate the exercise mechanisms in our bunks. The output of the air machines was cut down until there was just enough to keep us alive and thinking clearly.

"At intervals of several days, during our exercise and study periods, Captain McClelland turned up the air. We slept. And we dreamed. The dreams are recorded in full. When we could face them, they were played back to us. Our thoughts were played back, too. I conducted group therapy among us. We all grew to understand each other and ourselves, intimately, and now, in relation to our environment, we're perfectly adjusted."

"Did Captain McClelland join you in group therapy?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He was already perfectly adjusted."

She frowned faintly, glanced at the captain. "When we were conscious, we studied from the library of microfilm. We read all the great literature of Earth. We watched the great plays and pictures and the paintings and listened to the music. Sometimes our thoughts were hateful. There was self-pity and hysteria. There were times when one or two of us would withdraw almost to the point of death. Then Captain McClelland would knock us out with the shock gun.

"Slowly, over the years, our minds gradually merged into one mind. We thought and created and lived as if we were one person. There grew to be complete and perfect cooperation. And from this cooperation came some great works. Each one of us will tell you. I'll speak first."

She paused. "Psychology has always been my prime interest. My rating at school was genius. My aptitudes were precisely in line with the field of work I chose. Through the years, I've developed a theory, discovered a way to bring about cooperation between all men. This is possible in spite of your wars and hatreds and destruction." Frown creases wrinkled her parchment forehead. "I'd like to know if it would work."

Daniel Carlyle's voice was slightly above a whisper. "All my life, I'd wanted to write poetry. The meteor struck. I realized I wouldn't be allowed to die quickly.

I began to do what I'd always wanted to do. The words poured into the thought recorder. Everything I felt and thought is there and all I've been able to know and be from this one mind of ours that's in us all. And it's some of the finest poetry that's ever been written." He closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "It'd be good to know if anyone found them inspiring."

"I've always lived for adventure," said Crowley, the rocketman, his old voice steady and quiet. "I've been the one to quiet down last into the life it was necessary for us to live out there. But my thoughts ran on into distant universes and across endless stretches of space. And so at last, to keep my sanity, I wrote stories of all the adventures I should have had, and more. And in them is all the native power of me, of all adventurers, and the eternal sweep of the Universe where Man will always thrust out to new places." There was a faint trembling in his body and a pained light in his eyes. "Seems I ought to know if they'll ever be read."

In spite of Brady's frailness, the lieutenant was like a grizzled old animal growling with his last breath. "I was the most capable pilot that ever blasted off from Earth. But I was also an inventor and designer. A lot of the ships Earth pilots are flying today are basically my ideas. After the accident, I wanted to get drunk and make love and then let myself out into space, with a suit, and be there forever. But Captain McClelland's shock gun and the understanding seeping into me from the thought recorders calmed me down eventually.

"So I turned to creation as I lay there in my bunk. I designed many spaceships. And from those, I designed fewer and fewer, incorporating the best from each. And now I have on microfilm a ship that can thrust out to the ends of our galaxy. There aren't any flaws.... Oh, I tell you, by God, I'd like to see her come to life!"

He leaned back, sweat rolling down his bony cheeks.

Miss Gordon, dietician and televisor, the motionless old lady with cropped, white hair, and face bones across which the paper skin was stretched, said, "There was only one thing I wanted when I knew I couldn't have marriage and a family. There was a perfect food for the human animal. I could find it. I began working on formulas. Over and over again, I put the food elements together and took them apart and put them together again. I threw away the work of years and started over again until at last I had my perfect formula."

She clasped her hands. "Man's nutrition problem is solved. From the oceans and the air and the Earth, from the cosmic rays and the lights of the suns and from the particles of the microcosm, Man can take into his body all the nutrition that can enable him to live forever." She sat very still, smiling. "And it's got to be given a try."

Silence.

Colonel Halter watched the old figures sitting like figures in a wax museum,

waiting, waiting. He turned a dial. The picture that flashed onto the screen in his office showed the pocked ship standing upright now, like some tree that had grown in the middle of a desert where it was never meant to grow.

The space tugs had streaked out beyond the atmosphere to finish other assignments. There were no crowds, no official cars, no platforms, no bands. Only darkness and silence.

Halter turned a dial. The control room of the old ship flashed back onto the screen. The ancient crew sat as before. Halter saw his own face on their television screen.

Something was missing, he thought. What? What hadn't been said?

And then suddenly it came to him.

The captain. He hadn't spoken of any contribution he had made during those interminable years.

Halter thought back over Captain McClelland's record. No family. Wiped out when he was a baby in the last war. Educated and raised by the government. Never married. No entanglements with women. No close friends. Ship's captain at twenty-one. No failures. No vacations. No record of breakdown. Perfect physical condition. Strict disciplinarian. More time in space than on Earth by seventy-five per cent. No hobbies. No interest in the arts.... Apparently no flaw as a spaceman.... The end product of the stiffest training regimen yet devised by Man.

The ideal captain.

The records of the other five? All showing slight emotional instabilities when checked against the optimum score of a spaceman.

Dr. Mueller—a divorcee. A woman men had sought after. Dedicated in spare time to social psychology. Conflict in her decision as to whether she should go into the private practice of psychotherapy or specialize in space psychology. Interested in the study of neurosis caused by culture.

Lieutenant Brady—family man. Forced himself into mold of good husband and father. Brilliant designer. Ambition also to be space captain. Conflict between these three. Several years of psychotherapy which released his drive for adventure in space. *Alpha* mission to be his last. Lack of full leadership qualities prevented him from reaching captaincy.

Rocketman Crowley—typical man of action. Superb physique. Decathlon champion. Continual entanglements with women. Quick temper. Tendency to fight if pushed or crossed. Proud. However, if under good command, best rocketman in the service.

Astrogator Daniel Carlyle—highly sensitive. Psychosomatic symptoms unless out in space. Then in perfect health. Fine mathematician. Highly intuitive, yet logical. Saved four missions from disaster. Holder of Congressional Medal of

Honor. Hobby, poetry. Fiancee was boyhood sweetheart.

Dietician and televisor Caroline Gordon—youngest of crew. Twenty years. Too many aptitudes. Tendency toward immaturity. Many hobbies. Idealistic. Emotions unfocused. IQ 165. Success in any field of endeavor concentrated upon. At eighteen, specialized in dietetics and electronics. Highest ratings in field. Stable when under strict external discipline.

No, thought Halter. None of them fitted space like the completely self-sufficient McClelland, the man who could stand alone against that black, teeming, swirling endlessness of space.

He turned to the captain. The old face was placid, the eyes slightly out of focus.

"Captain McClelland," Halter said sharply.

The pale eyes blinked and looked keenly on Halter's face.

"You want fuel to take you back out into space."

"That's right."

"And if you don't get it, you'll press a button on the arm of your chair and you'll all die of carbon monoxide poisoning."

"Exactly."

"I'm curious about one point." Halter paused. "What did *you* do, Captain, while the others were working on their various projects?"

Captain McClelland scowled at Halter for a long moment. "Why do you want to know that?"

"Your crew members became lost in some work they loved. They told me about it with a certain amount of enthusiasm. You haven't told me what you did. I'd like to know—for the records."

"I watched them, Colonel. I watched them and dreamed of the time when I could take them and the ship back out into space under her own power. I love space and I love this ship. I love knowing she's under power and shooting out to the stars. There's nothing more for me."

"What else did you do besides watch them?"

"I activated the machinery that moved my bunk close to the controls. I practiced taking the ship through maneuvers. I kept the controls in perfect working order so I'd be ready to take off again someday."

"If we repaired the ship so you could take off, the first shock of rocket thrust would kill you all."

"We're willing to take that chance."

Colonel Halter looked around the half circle of old faces. "And all your long years of work would be for nothing. Each of you, except Captain McClelland, has made a contribution to Earth and Man. You're needed here, not in the emptiness

of space."

He saw the eyes of the five watching him intently; saw a tiny flicker of surprise and interest on their faces.

"You're destroying Earth," said the captain, his voice rising, "with your wars and your quarrels. We've all of us found peace. We're going to keep it."

Halter ignored the captain and looked at the five.

"There are many of *us* on Earth, who are fighting a war without blood, to save mankind. We've made progress. We've worked out agreements among the warring nations to do their fighting on the barren planets where there aren't any native inhabitants, so noncombatants on Earth won't be killed and so the Earth won't be laid waste. That was the fighting you saw while you were coming in.

"This is just *one* example. And there're a lot of us contributing ideas and effort. If all of us who're working for Earth were to leave it and go out into space, the ones who have to fight wars would make the Earth as barren as the Moon. This is our place in the Universe and it's got to be saved."

"We've adjusted to the control room of this ship and to each other," said McClelland flatly. "Our work's done."

"Let's put it like this, Captain. Maybe *your* work's done. Maybe *you're* not interested in what happens to Earth." Halter turned to the others. "But what *you've* done adds up to a search for answers here on Earth. Poetry. Design of a flawless spaceship. A psychological theory. A perfect diet. Novels about Man pushing out and out into space. All this indicates a deep concern for the health of humanity and its success."

"We're not concerned," retorted the captain, "with the health or success of humanity."

Halter sharply examined the other faces. He saw a flicker of sadness in one, anger in another, uncertainty, fear, joy.

He said, "For seventy-five years, you obey your captain. You listen to what he says. And everything is a command. Yet in yourselves you feel a drive to carry out your ideas, your creations, to their logical ends. Which means, will they work when they're applied to Man? Will people read the novels? Will they catch the meaning of the poetry? Will the spaceships really work as they're supposed to? Will the psychological theory really promote cooperation? Is there supreme health in this marvelous diet?"

He gave them a moment to think and then continued. "But if you continue to follow the commands of the captain, you'll be dead before you're out of the Earth's atmosphere. You'll never know. Maybe Man will prove that your great works are only dreams.... But I think there's a great need in you to know, one way or the other."

There was a faint stirring among them, like that of ancient machines being activated after years of lying dormant. They glanced at each other. They fidgeted. Trouble twisted their faces.

"Colonel Halter," said the captain, "I'm warning you. My thumb is on the button. I'll release the gas. Do we get the repairs and the fuel to take off from Earth, or don't we?"

Colonel Halter leaned grimly toward the captain. "You've spent fifty years with one idea—to stay out in space forever. You've made no effort to create or do one single constructive act. I'll tell you whether or not you get the fuel and the repairs—*after* I hear what someone in your crew has to say."

Silence hung tensely between the control room of the ship and Colonel Halter's office on Earth. The captain was glaring now at Halter. A tear showed in the corner of each of Dr. Anna Mueller's old eyes. Lieutenant Brady was gripping the arms of his chair. Daniel Carlyle's eyes were closed and his head shook slightly, as though from palsy. There was a faint, enigmatic smile on Caroline Gordon's face. The cords on Crowley's neck stood out through the tan and wrinkled wrapping-paper skin.

*By God,* thought Halter, *they're all sane except the captain. And they've got to do it. They've got to come out on their own steam or die in that control room.*

"I'm waiting," he said. "Is your work going to die and you with it?"

"We'll leave all the records," said the captain, his thumb poised over the button on the arm of his chair. "That's enough."

Halter ignored him. "Each of you can help. You've only done part of the work." He stood and struck the desk with the flat of his hand. "Damn it, say something, one of you!"

Still the silence and the flickering looks all around.

Halter heard a sob. He saw Dr. Anna Mueller's head drop forward and her shoulders tremble. The others were staring at her, as if she had suddenly materialized among them, like a ghost.

Then her voice, through the trembling and the faint crying: "I've—I've got to know."

The captain got creakily to his feet. "Dr. Mueller! Do you want me to use the gun again?"

She raised her face to his. There was pain in it. "I've—got work to do. There's so—little time."

"That's right. On this ship. You're part of the crew. There'll be plenty of work once we get out in space again."

"I've got to see if my theory's right."

"Colonel Halter," said the captain, "this is insubordination. Mutiny."

He raised the gun tremblingly, pointed the black muzzle at Dr. Mueller, sighted along the barrel.

"Wait," said Halter. "You're right."

Captain McClelland hesitated.

"It's quite plain," went on Halter, "that Dr. Mueller is alone among you. She wants to come out and go on with her work. The rest of you want the closed-in uterine warmth and peace of this room you're existing in. You can't face the possibility of failure. So I'm afraid she'll have to be sacrificed. After all, you do need a full crew to move the ship—even if you are all dead a few seconds after blastoff." He paused, looking intently at Brady, Crowley, Carlyle, Gordon, where they sat in the half circle, staring back at him. "So—"

Lieutenant Brady struggled up from his chair.

"I've got twenty-five years of life. I've some ships to design."

"That goes for me, too," said Crowley, the rocketman. "Will anybody want to read my novels?"

Astrogator Carlyle leaned forward. "There are many more poems to be written."

"Give me a soundproof laboratory," said Caroline Gordon. "I'll add another fifty years to all your lives."

"I'm afraid it is mutiny, Captain," said Halter.

The captain started toward his chair, his hand reaching for the button on its arm.

Lieutenant Brady stumbled forward, blocking his way.

Halter could only watch, thinking, *It's up to them. They've got to do it now!*

He saw the captain draw his shock gun; saw light flare at its muzzle; saw Lieutenant Brady crumple like a collapsing skeleton.

Crowley reached forward, grasping McClelland's shoulder. The gun swung toward him. A stream of light squirted into his middle. Crowley fell forward, pulling the captain down with him. The three other oldsters were above the three black figures sprawled on the floor, like tangled puppets. They hesitated a moment, then fell upon the ones below them, black arms and legs twitching about now like the legs of dying spiders, struggling weakly.

A flash of light exploded beneath these twisting black reeds and streaks of it shot out all through the waving black cluster.

The next moment, they settled and were quiet.

There was a stillness in the ancient control room, like the stillness in a sunken ship at the bottom of the sea. It lingered for a long time, while Colonel Halter watched and waited.

Dr. Mueller's voice, seventy-five years tired, said, "He's—quiet now. Please

come and take us out.''

Colonel Halter switched on his desk visiophone.

''They're coming out,'' he said quietly. ''I'll be there to supervise.''

On the visiophone, the general's image nodded. ''Congratulations, Colonel. How are they?''

''There'll be one case for psycho. Captain McClelland.''

''I'll be damned!'' exclaimed the general. ''From his record, I thought he'd never break!''

''Let's say he couldn't bend, sir.'' A pause. ''And yet he did keep them from destroying themselves.''

''He'll be made well again.... What about the others?''

''I think they, too, are very great and human people.''

''Well,'' said the general, ''they're *your* patients. I'll see you at the ship in five minutes.''

''I'll be there, sir.'' Colonel Halter flipped the switch. The visiophone blanked out. He looked at the television screen.

The six black-clothed figures were quiet on the floor of their ship's control room. They reminded him of sleeping children curled together for warmth.

As he left his office and walked out into the humming city, he felt drained, still shaking with tension, realizing even now how close he had come to failure.

But there was the scarred and pitted needle-nosed old hull, bright with moonlight, standing like a monument against the night sky.

Not a monument to the past, though.

It marked the birthplace of the future ... and he had been midwife. He felt his shoulders straighten at the knowledge as he walked toward the ancient ship.

## PIPER IN THE WOODS

*Earth maintained an important garrison on Asteroid Y-3. Now suddenly it was imperiled with a biological impossibility—men becoming plants!*

"Well, Corporal Westerburg," Doctor Henry Harris said gently, "just why do you think you're a plant?"

As he spoke, Harris glanced down again at the card on his desk. It was from the Base Commander himself, made out in Cox's heavy scrawl: Doc, this is the lad I told you about. Talk to him and try to find out how he got this delusion. He's from the new Garrison, the new check-station on Asteroid Y-3, and we don't want anything to go wrong there. Especially a silly damn thing like this!

Harris pushed the card aside and stared back up at the youth across the desk from him. The young man seemed ill at ease and appeared to be avoiding answering the question Harris had put to him. Harris frowned. Westerburg was a good-looking chap, actually handsome in his Patrol uniform, a shock of blond hair over one eye. He was tall, almost six feet, a fine healthy lad, just two years out of Training, according to the card. Born in Detroit. Had measles when he was nine. Interested in jet engines, tennis, and girls. Twenty-six years old.

"Well, Corporal Westerburg," Doctor Harris said again. "Why do you think you're a plant?"

The Corporal looked up shyly. He cleared his throat. "Sir, I *am* a plant, I don't just think so. I've been a plant for several days, now."

"I see." The Doctor nodded. "You mean that you weren't always a plant?"

"No, sir. I just became a plant recently."

"And what were you before you became a plant?"

"Well, sir, I was just like the rest of you."

There was silence. Doctor Harris took up his pen and scratched a few lines, but nothing of importance came. A plant? And such a healthy-looking lad! Harris removed his steel-rimmed glasses and polished them with his handkerchief. He

put them on again and leaned back in his chair. "Care for a cigarette, Corporal?"

"No, sir."

The Doctor lit one himself, resting his arm on the edge of the chair. "Corporal, you must realize that there are very few men who become plants, especially on such short notice. I have to admit you are the first person who has ever told me such a thing."

"Yes, sir, I realize it's quite rare."

"You can understand why I'm interested, then. When you say you're a plant, you mean you're not capable of mobility? Or do you mean you're a vegetable, as opposed to an animal? Or just what?"

The Corporal looked away. "I can't tell you any more," he murmured. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Well, would you mind telling me how you became a plant?"

Corporal Westerburg hesitated. He stared down at the floor, then out the window at the spaceport, then at a fly on the desk. At last he stood up, getting slowly to his feet. "I can't even tell you that, sir," he said.

"You can't? Why not?"

"Because—because I promised not to."

The room was silent. Doctor Harris rose, too, and they both stood facing each other. Harris frowned, rubbing his jaw. "Corporal, just who did you promise?"

"I can't even tell you that, sir. I'm sorry."

The Doctor considered this. At last he went to the door and opened it. "All right, Corporal. You may go now. And thanks for your time."

"I'm sorry I'm not more helpful." The Corporal went slowly out and Harris closed the door after him. Then he went across his office to the vidphone. He rang Commander Cox's letter. A moment later the beefy good-natured face of the Base Commander appeared.

"Cox, this is Harris. I talked to him, all right. All I could get is the statement that he's a plant. What else is there? What kind of behavior pattern?"

"Well," Cox said, "the first thing they noticed was that he wouldn't do any work. The Garrison Chief reported that this Westerburg would wander off outside the Garrison and just sit, all day long. Just sit."

"In the sun?"

"Yes. Just sit in the sun. Then at nightfall he would come back in. When they asked why he wasn't working in the jet repair building he told them he had to be out in the sun. Then he said—" Cox hesitated.

"Yes? Said what?"

"He said that work was unnatural. That it was a waste of time. That the only worthwhile thing was to sit and contemplate—outside."

"What then?"

"Then they asked him how he got that idea, and then he revealed to them that he had become a plant."

"I'm going to have to talk to him again, I can see," Harris said. "And he's applied for a permanent discharge from the Patrol? What reason did he give?"

"The same, that he's a plant now, and has no more interest in being a Patrolman. All he wants to do is sit in the sun. It's the damnedest thing I ever heard."

"All right. I think I'll visit him in his quarters." Harris looked at his watch. "I'll go over after dinner."

"Good luck," Cox said gloomily. "But who ever heard of a man turning into a plant? We told him it wasn't possible, but he just smiled at us."

"I'll let you know how I make out," Harris said.

Harris walked slowly down the hall. It was after six; the evening meal was over. A dim concept was coming into his mind, but it was much too soon to be sure. He increased his pace, turning right at the end of the hall. Two nurses passed, hurrying by. Westerburg was quartered with a buddy, a man who had been injured in a jet blast and who was now almost recovered. Harris came to the dorm wing and stopped, checking the numbers on the doors.

"Can I help you, sir?" the robot attendant said, gliding up.

"I'm looking for Corporal Westerburg's room."

"Three doors to the right."

Harris went on. Asteroid Y-3 had only recently been garrisoned and staffed. It had become the primary check-point to halt and examine ships entering the system from outer space. The Garrison made sure that no dangerous bacteria, fungus, or what-not arrived to infect the system. A nice asteroid it was, warm, well-watered, with trees and lakes and lots of sunlight. And the most modern Garrison in the nine planets. He shook his head, coming to the third door. He stopped, raising his hand and knocking.

"Who's there?" sounded through the door.

"I want to see Corporal Westerburg."

The door opened. A bovine youth with horn-rimmed glasses looked out, a book in his hand. "Who are you?"

"Doctor Harris."

"I'm sorry, sir. Corporal Westerburg is asleep."

"Would he mind if I woke him up? I want very much to talk to him." Harris peered inside. He could see a neat room, with a desk, a rug and lamp, and two bunks. On one of the bunks was Westerburg, lying face up, his arms folded across

his chest, his eyes tightly closed.

"Sir," the bovine youth said, "I'm afraid I can't wake him up for you, much as I'd like to."

"You can't? Why not?"

"Sir, Corporal Westerburg won't wake up, not after the sun sets. He just won't. He can't be wakened."

"Cataleptic? Really?"

"But in the morning, as soon as the sun comes up, he leaps out of bed and goes outside. Stays the whole day."

"I see," the Doctor said. "Well, thanks anyhow." He went back out into the hall and the door shut after him. "There's more to this than I realized," he murmured. He went on back the way he had come.

It was a warm sunny day. The sky was almost free of clouds and a gentle wind moved through the cedars along the bank of the stream. There was a path leading from the hospital building down the slope to the stream. At the stream a small bridge led over to the other side, and a few patients were standing on the bridge, wrapped in their bathrobes, looking aimlessly down at the water.

It took Harris several minutes to find Westerburg. The youth was not with the other patients, near or around the bridge. He had gone farther down, past the cedar trees and out onto a strip of bright meadow, where poppies and grass grew everywhere. He was sitting on the stream bank, on a flat grey stone, leaning back and staring up, his mouth open a little. He did not notice the Doctor until Harris was almost beside him.

"Hello," Harris said softly.

Westerburg opened his eyes, looking up. He smiled and got slowly to his feet, a graceful, flowing motion that was rather surprising for a man of his size. "Hello, Doctor. What brings you out here?"

"Nothing. Thought I'd get some sun."

"Here, you can share my rock." Westerburg moved over and Harris sat down gingerly, being careful not to catch his trousers on the sharp edges of the rock. He lit a cigarette and gazed silently down at the water. Beside him, Westerburg had resumed his strange position, leaning back, resting on his hands, staring up with his eyes shut tight.

"Nice day," the Doctor said.

"Yes."

"Do you come here every day?"

"Yes."

"You like it better out here than inside."

"I can't stay inside," Westerburg said.

"You can't? How do you mean, 'can't'?"

"You would die without air, wouldn't you?" the Corporal said.

"And you'd die without sunlight?"

Westerburg nodded.

"Corporal, may I ask you something? Do you plan to do this the rest of your life, sit out in the sun on a flat rock? Nothing else?"

Westerburg nodded.

"How about your job? You went to school for years to become a Patrolman. You wanted to enter the Patrol very badly. You were given a fine rating and a first-class position. How do you feel, giving all that up? You know, it won't be easy to get back in again. Do you realize that?"

"I realize it."

"And you're really going to give it all up?"

"That's right."

Harris was silent for a while. At last he put his cigarette out and turned toward the youth. "All right, let's say you give up your job and sit in the sun. Well, what happens, then? Someone else has to do the job instead of you. Isn't that true? The job has to be done, your job has to be done. And if you don't do it someone else has to."

"I suppose so."

"Westerburg, suppose everyone felt the way you do? Suppose everyone wanted to sit in the sun all day? What would happen? No one would check ships coming from outer space. Bacteria and toxic crystals would enter the system and cause mass death and suffering. Isn't that right?"

"If everyone felt the way I do they wouldn't be going into outer space."

"But they have to. They have to trade, they have to get minerals and products and new plants."

"Why?"

"To keep society going."

"Why?"

"Well—" Harris gestured. "People couldn't live without society."

Westerburg said nothing to that. Harris watched him, but the youth did not answer.

"Isn't that right?" Harris said.

"Perhaps. It's a peculiar business, Doctor. You know, I struggled for years to get through Training. I had to work and pay my own way. Washed dishes, worked in kitchens. Studied at night, learned, crammed, worked on and on. And you know what I think, now?"

"What?"

"I wish I'd become a plant earlier."

Doctor Harris stood up. "Westerburg, when you come inside, will you stop off at my office? I want to give you a few tests, if you don't mind."

"The shock box?" Westerburg smiled. "I knew that would be coming around. Sure, I don't mind."

Nettled, Harris left the rock, walking back up the bank a short distance. "About three, Corporal?"

The Corporal nodded.

Harris made his way up the hill, to the path, toward the hospital building. The whole thing was beginning to become more clear to him. A boy who had struggled all his life. Financial insecurity. Idealized goal, getting a Patrol assignment. Finally reached it, found the load too great. And on Asteroid Y-3 there was too much vegetation to look at all day. Primitive identification and projection on the flora of the asteroid. Concept of security involved in immobility and permanence. Unchanging forest.

He entered the building. A robot orderly stopped him almost at once. "Sir, Commander Cox wants you urgently, on the vidphone."

"Thanks." Harris strode to his office. He dialed Cox's letter and the Commander's face came presently into focus. "Cox? This is Harris. I've been out talking to the boy. I'm beginning to get this lined up, now. I can see the pattern, too much load too long. Finally gets what he wants and the idealization shatters under the—"

"Harris!" Cox barked. "Shut up and listen. I just got a report from Y-3. They're sending an express rocket here. It's on the way."

"An express rocket?"

"Five more cases like Westerburg. All say they're plants! The Garrison Chief is worried as hell. Says we must find out what it is or the Garrison will fall apart, right away. Do you get me, Harris? Find out what it is!"

"Yes, sir," Harris murmured. "Yes, sir."

By the end of the week there were twenty cases, and all, of course, were from Asteroid Y-3.

Commander Cox and Harris stood together at the top of the hill, looking gloomily down at the stream below. Sixteen men and four women sat in the sun along the bank, none of them moving, none speaking. An hour had gone by since Cox and Harris appeared, and in all that time the twenty people below had not stirred.

"I don't get it," Cox said, shaking his head. "I just absolutely don't get it. Harris, is this the beginning of the end? Is everything going to start cracking around

us? It gives me a hell of a strange feeling to see those people down there, basking away in the sun, just sitting and basking."

"Who's that man there with the red hair?"

"That's Ulrich Deutsch. He was Second in Command at the Garrison. Now look at him! Sits and dozes with his mouth open and his eyes shut. A week ago that man was climbing, going right up to the top. When the Garrison Chief retires he was supposed to take over. Maybe another year, at the most. All his life he's been climbing to get up there."

"And now he sits in the sun," Harris finished.

"That woman. The brunette, with the short hair. Career woman. Head of the entire office staff of the Garrison. And the man beside her. Janitor. And that cute little gal there, with the bosom. Secretary, just out of school. All kinds. And I got a note this morning, three more coming in sometime today."

Harris nodded. "The strange thing is—they really want to sit down there. They're completely rational; they could do something else, but they just don't care to."

"Well?" Cox said. "What are you going to do? Have you found anything? We're counting on you. Let's hear it."

"I couldn't get anything out of them directly," Harris said, "but I've had some interesting results with the shock box. Let's go inside and I'll show you."

"Fine," Cox turned and started toward the hospital. "Show me anything you've got. This is serious. Now I know how Tiberius felt when Christianity showed up in high places."

Harris snapped off the light. The room was pitch black. "I'll run this first reel for you. The subject is one of the best biologists stationed at the Garrison. Robert Bradshaw. He came in yesterday. I got a good run from the shock box because Bradshaw's mind is so highly differentiated. There's a lot of repressed material of a non-rational nature, more than usual."

He pressed a switch. The projector whirred, and on the far wall a three-dimensional image appeared in color, so real that it might have been the man himself. Robert Bradshaw was a man of fifty, heavy-set, with iron grey hair and a square jaw. He sat in the chair calmly, his hands resting on the arms, oblivious to the electrodes attached to his neck and wrist. "There I go," Harris said. "Watch."

His film-image appeared, approaching Bradshaw. "Now, Mr. Bradshaw," his image said, "this won't hurt you at all, and it'll help us a lot." The image rotated the controls on the shock box. Bradshaw stiffened, and his jaw set, but otherwise he gave no sign. The image of Harris regarded him for a time and then stepped away from the controls.

"Can you hear me, Mr. Bradshaw?" the image asked.

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Robert C. Bradshaw."

"What is your position?"

"Chief Biologist at the check-station on Y-3."

"Are you there now?"

"No, I'm back on Terra. In a hospital."

"Why?"

"Because I admitted to the Garrison Chief that I had become a plant."

"Is that true? That you are a plant."

"Yes, in a non-biological sense. I retain the physiology of a human being, of course."

"What do you mean, then, that you're a plant?"

"The reference is to attitudinal response, to Weltanschauung."

"Go on."

"It is possible for a warm-blooded animal, an upper primate, to adopt the psychology of a plant, to some extent."

"Yes?"

"I refer to this."

"And the others? They refer to this also?"

"Yes."

"How did this occur, your adopting this attitude?"

Bradshaw's image hesitated, the lips twisting. "See?" Harris said to Cox. "Strong conflict. He wouldn't have gone on, if he had been fully conscious."

"I—"

"Yes?"

"I was taught to become a plant."

The image of Harris showed surprise and interest. "What do you mean, you were taught to become a plant?"

"They realized my problems and taught me to become a plant. Now I'm free from them, the problems."

"Who? Who taught you?"

"The Pipers."

"Who? The Pipers? Who are the Pipers?"

There was no answer.

"Mr. Bradshaw, who are the Pipers?"

After a long, agonized pause, the heavy lips parted. "They live in the

woods....''

Harris snapped off the projector, and the lights came on. He and Cox blinked. ''That was all I could get,'' Harris said. ''But I was lucky to get that. He wasn't supposed to tell, not at all. That was the thing they all promised not to do, tell who taught them to become plants. The Pipers who live in the woods, on Asteroid Y-3.''

''You got this story from all twenty?''

''No.'' Harris grimaced. ''Most of them put up too much fight. I couldn't even get this much from them.''

Cox reflected. ''The Pipers. Well? What do you propose to do? Just wait around until you can get the full story? Is that your program?''

''No,'' Harris said. ''Not at all. I'm going to Y-3 and find out who the Pipers are, myself.''

The small patrol ship made its landing with care and precision, its jets choking into final silence. The hatch slid back and Doctor Henry Harris found himself staring out at a field, a brown, sun-baked landing field. At the end of the field was a tall signal tower. Around the field on all sides were long grey buildings, the Garrison check-station itself. Not far off a huge Venusian cruiser was parked, a vast green hulk, like an enormous lime. The technicians from the station were swarming all over it, checking and examining each inch of it for lethal life-forms and poisons that might have attached themselves to the hull.

''All out, sir,'' the pilot said.

Harris nodded. He took hold of his two suitcases and stepped carefully down. The ground was hot underfoot, and he blinked in the bright sunlight. Jupiter was in the sky, and the vast planet reflected considerable sunlight down onto the asteroid.

Harris started across the field, carrying his suitcases. A field attendant was already busy opening the storage compartment of the patrol ship, extracting his trunk. The attendant lowered the trunk into a waiting dolly and came after him, manipulating the little truck with bored skill.

As Harris came to the entrance of the signal tower the gate slid back and a man came forward, an older man, large and robust, with white hair and a steady walk.

''How are you, Doctor?'' he said, holding his hand out. ''I'm Lawrence Watts, the Garrison Chief.''

They shook hands. Watts smiled down at Harris. He was a huge old man, still regal and straight in his dark blue uniform, with his gold epaulets sparkling on his shoulders.

''Have a good trip?'' Watts asked. ''Come on inside and I'll have a drink fixed for you. It gets hot around here, with the Big Mirror up there.''

"Jupiter?" Harris followed him inside the building. The signal tower was cool and dark, a welcome relief. "Why is the gravity so near Terra's? I expected to go flying off like a kangaroo. Is it artificial?"

"No. There's a dense core of some kind to the asteroid, some kind of metallic deposit. That's why we picked this asteroid out of all the others. It made the construction problem much simpler, and it also explains why the asteroid has natural air and water. Did you see the hills?"

"The hills?"

"When we get up higher in the tower we'll be able to see over the buildings. There's quite a natural park here, a regular little forest, complete with everything you'd want. Come in here, Harris. This is my office." The old man strode at quite a clip, around the corner and into a large, well-furnished apartment. "Isn't this pleasant? I intend to make my last year here as amiable as possible." He frowned. "Of course, with Deutsch gone, I may be here forever. Oh, well." He shrugged. "Sit down, Harris."

"Thanks." Harris took a chair, stretching his legs out. He watched Watts as he closed the door to the hall. "By the way, any more cases come up?"

"Two more today," Watts was grim. "Makes almost thirty, in all. We have three hundred men in this station. At the rate it's going—"

"Chief, you spoke about a forest on the asteroid. Do you allow the crew to go into the forest at will? Or do you restrict them to the buildings and grounds?"

Watts rubbed his jaw. "Well, it's a difficult situation, Harris. I have to let the men leave the grounds sometimes. They can see the forest from the buildings, and as long as you can see a nice place to stretch out and relax that does it. Once every ten days they have a full period of rest. Then they go out and fool around."

"And then it happens?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But as long as they can see the forest they'll want to go. I can't help it."

"I know. I'm not censuring you. Well, what's your theory? What happens to them out there? What do they do?"

"What happens? Once they get out there and take it easy for a while they don't want to come back and work. It's boondoggling. Playing hookey. They don't want to work, so off they go."

"How about this business of their delusions?"

Watts laughed good-naturedly. "Listen, Harris. You know as well as I do that's a lot of poppycock. They're no more plants than you or I. They just don't want to work, that's all. When I was a cadet we had a few ways to make people work. I wish we could lay a few on their backs, like we used to."

"You think this is simple goldbricking, then?"

"Don't you think it is?"

"No," Harris said. "They really believe they're plants. I put them through the high-frequency shock treatment, the shock box. The whole nervous system is paralyzed, all inhibitions stopped cold. They tell the truth, then. And they said the same thing—and more."

Watts paced back and forth, his hands clasped behind his back. "Harris, you're a doctor, and I suppose you know what you're talking about. But look at the situation here. We have a garrison, a good modern garrison. We're probably the most modern outfit in the system. Every new device and gadget is here that science can produce. Harris, this garrison is one vast machine. The men are parts, and each has his job, the Maintenance Crew, the Biologists, the Office Crew, the Managerial Staff.

"Look what happens when one person steps away from his job. Everything else begins to creak. We can't service the bugs if no one services the machines. We can't order food to feed the crews if no one makes out reports, takes inventories. We can't direct any kind of activity if the Second in Command decides to go out and sit in the sun all day.

"Thirty people, one tenth of the Garrison. But we can't run without them. The Garrison is built that way. If you take the supports out the whole building falls. No one can leave. We're all tied here, and these people know it. They know they have no right to do that, run off on their own. No one has that right anymore. We're all too tightly interwoven to suddenly start doing what we want. It's unfair to the rest, the majority."

Harris nodded. "Chief, can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"Are there any inhabitants on the asteroid? Any natives?"

"Natives?" Watts considered. "Yes, there's some kind of aborigines living out there." He waved vaguely toward the window.

"What are they like? Have you seen them?"

"Yes, I've seen them. At least, I saw them when we first came here. They hung around for a while, watching us, then after a time they disappeared."

"Did they die off? Diseases of some kind?"

"No. They just—just disappeared. Into their forest. They're still there, someplace."

"What kind of people are they?"

"Well, the story is that they're originally from Mars. They don't look much like Martians, though. They're dark, a kind of coppery color. Thin. Very agile, in their own way. They hunt and fish. No written language. We don't pay much attention to them."

"I see." Harris paused. "Chief, have you ever heard of anything called—The Pipers?"

"The Pipers?" Watts frowned. "No. Why?"

"The patients mentioned something called The Pipers. According to Bradshaw, the Pipers taught him to become a plant. He learned it from them, a kind of teaching."

"The Pipers. What are they?"

"I don't know," Harris admitted. "I thought maybe you might know. My first assumption, of course, was that they're the natives. But now I'm not so sure, not after hearing your description of them."

"The natives are primitive savages. They don't have anything to teach anybody, especially a top-flight biologist."

Harris hesitated. "Chief, I'd like to go into the woods and look around. Is that possible?"

"Certainly. I can arrange it for you. I'll give you one of the men to show you around."

"I'd rather go alone. Is there any danger?"

"No, none that I know of. Except—"

"Except the Pipers," Harris finished. "I know. Well, there's only one way to find them, and that's it. I'll have to take my chances."

"If you walk in a straight line," Chief Watts said, "you'll find yourself back at the Garrison in about six hours. It's a damn small asteroid. There's a couple of streams and lakes, so don't fall in."

"How about snakes or poisonous insects?"

"Nothing like that reported. We did a lot of tramping around at first, but it's grown back now, the way it was. We never encountered anything dangerous."

"Thanks, Chief," Harris said. They shook hands. "I'll see you before nightfall."

"Good luck." The Chief and his two armed escorts turned and went back across the rise, down the other side toward the Garrison. Harris watched them go until they disappeared inside the building. Then he turned and started into the grove of trees.

The woods were very silent around him as he walked. Trees towered up on all sides of him, huge dark-green trees like eucalyptus. The ground underfoot was soft with endless leaves that had fallen and rotted into soil. After a while the grove of high trees fell behind and he found himself crossing a dry meadow, the grass and weeds burned brown in the sun. Insects buzzed around him, rising up from the dry weed-stalks. Something scuttled ahead, hurrying through the undergrowth. He caught sight of a grey ball with many legs, scampering furiously,

its antennae weaving.

The meadow ended at the bottom of a hill. He was going up, now, going higher and higher. Ahead of him an endless expanse of green rose, acres of wild growth. He scrambled to the top finally, blowing and panting, catching his breath.

He went on. Now he was going down again, plunging into a deep gully. Tall ferns grew, as large as trees. He was entering a living Jurassic forest, ferns that stretched out endlessly ahead of him. Down he went, walking carefully. The air began to turn cold around him. The floor of the gully was damp and silent; underfoot the ground was almost wet.

He came out on a level table. It was dark, with the ferns growing up on all sides, dense growths of ferns, silent and unmoving. He came upon a natural path, an old stream bed, rough and rocky, but easy to follow. The air was thick and oppressive. Beyond the ferns he could see the side of the next hill, a green field rising up.

Something grey was ahead. Rocks, piled-up boulders, scattered and stacked here and there. The stream bed led directly to them. Apparently this had been a pool of some kind, a stream emptying from it. He climbed the first of the boulders awkwardly, feeling his way up. At the top he paused, resting again.

As yet he had had no luck. So far he had not met any of the natives. It would be through them that he would find the mysterious Pipers that were stealing the men away, if such really existed. If he could find the natives, talk to them, perhaps he could find out something. But as yet he had been unsuccessful. He looked around. The woods were very silent. A slight breeze moved through the ferns, rustling them, but that was all. Where were the natives? Probably they had a settlement of some sort, huts, a clearing. The asteroid was small; he should be able to find them by nightfall.

He started down the rocks. More rocks rose up ahead and he climbed them. Suddenly he stopped, listening. Far off, he could hear a sound, the sound of water. Was he approaching a pool of some kind? He went on again, trying to locate the sound. He scrambled down rocks and up rocks, and all around him there was silence, except for the splashing of distant water. Maybe a waterfall, water in motion. A stream. If he found the stream he might find the natives.

The rocks ended and the stream bed began again, but this time it was wet, the bottom muddy and overgrown with moss. He was on the right track; not too long ago this stream had flowed, probably during the rainy season. He went up on the side of the stream, pushing through the ferns and vines. A golden snake slid expertly out of his path. Something glinted ahead, something sparkling through the ferns. Water. A pool. He hurried, pushing the vines aside and stepping out, leaving them behind.

He was standing on the edge of a pool, a deep pool sunk in a hollow of grey

rocks, surrounded by ferns and vines. The water was clear and bright, and in motion, flowing in a waterfall at the far end. It was beautiful, and he stood watching, marveling at it, the undisturbed quality of it. Untouched, it was. Just as it had always been, probably. As long as the asteroid existed. Was he the first to see it? Perhaps. It was so hidden, so concealed by the ferns. It gave him a strange feeling, a feeling almost of ownership. He stepped down a little toward the water.

And it was then he noticed her.

The girl was sitting on the far edge of the pool, staring down into the water, resting her head on one drawn-up knee. She had been bathing; he could see that at once. Her coppery body was still wet and glistening with moisture, sparkling in the sun. She had not seen him. He stopped, holding his breath, watching her.

She was lovely, very lovely, with long dark hair that wound around her shoulders and arms. Her body was slim, very slender, with a supple grace to it that made him stare, accustomed as he was to various forms of anatomy. How silent she was! Silent and unmoving, staring down at the water. Time passed, strange, unchanging time, as he watched the girl. Time might even have ceased, with the girl sitting on the rock staring into the water, and the rows of great ferns behind her, as rigid as if they had been painted there.

All at once the girl looked up. Harris shifted, suddenly conscious of himself as an intruder. He stepped back. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I'm from the Garrison. I didn't mean to come poking around."

She nodded without speaking.

"You don't mind?" Harris asked presently.

"No."

So she spoke Terran! He moved a little toward her, around the side of the pool. "I hope you don't mind my bothering you. I won't be on the asteroid very long. This is my first day here. I just arrived from Terra."

She smiled faintly.

"I'm a doctor. Henry Harris." He looked down at her, at the slim coppery body, gleaming in the sunlight, a faint sheen of moisture on her arms and thighs. "You might be interested in why I'm here." He paused. "Maybe you can even help me."

She looked up a little. "Oh?"

"Would you like to help me?"

She smiled. "Yes. Of course."

"That's good. Mind if I sit down?" He looked around and found himself a flat rock. He sat down slowly, facing her. "Cigarette?"

"No."

"Well, I'll have one." He lit up, taking a deep breath. "You see, we have a

problem at the Garrison. Something has been happening to some of the men, and it seems to be spreading. We have to find out what causes it or we won't be able to run the Garrison."

He waited for a moment. She nodded slightly. How silent she was! Silent and unmoving. Like the ferns.

"Well, I've been able to find out a few things from them, and one very interesting fact stands out. They keep saying that something called—called The Pipers are responsible for their condition. They say the Pipers taught them—" He stopped. A strange look had flitted across her dark, small face. "Do you know the Pipers?"

She nodded.

Acute satisfaction flooded over Harris. "You do? I was sure the natives would know." He stood up again. "I was sure they would, if the Pipers really existed. Then they do exist, do they?"

"They exist."

Harris frowned. "And they're here, in the woods?"

"Yes."

"I see." He ground his cigarette out impatiently. "You don't suppose there's any chance you could take me to them, do you?"

"Take you?"

"Yes. I have this problem and I have to solve it. You see, the Base Commander on Terra has assigned this to me, this business about the Pipers. It has to be solved. And I'm the one assigned to the job. So it's important to me to find them. Do you see? Do you understand?"

She nodded.

"Well, will you take me to them?"

The girl was silent. For a long time she sat, staring down into the water, resting her head against her knee. Harris began to become impatient. He fidgeted back and forth, resting first on one leg and then on the other.

"Well, will you?" he said again. "It's important to the whole Garrison. What do you say?" He felt around in his pockets. "Maybe I could give you something. What do I have...." He brought out his lighter. "I could give you my lighter."

The girl stood up, rising slowly, gracefully, without motion or effort. Harris' mouth fell open. How supple she was, gliding to her feet in a single motion! He blinked. Without effort she had stood, seemingly without change. All at once she was standing instead of sitting, standing and looking calmly at him, her small face expressionless.

"Will you?" he said.

"Yes. Come along." She turned away, moving toward the row of ferns.

Harris followed quickly, stumbling across the rocks. "Fine," he said. "Thanks

a lot. I'm very interested to meet these Pipers. Where are you taking me, to your village? How much time do we have before nightfall?"

The girl did not answer. She had entered the ferns already, and Harris quickened his pace to keep from losing her. How silently she glided!

"Wait," he called. "Wait for me."

The girl paused, waiting for him, slim and lovely, looking silently back.

He entered the ferns, hurrying after her.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Commander Cox said. "It sure didn't take you long." He leaped down the steps two at a time. "Let me give you a hand."

Harris grinned, lugging his heavy suitcases. He set them down and breathed a sigh of relief. "It isn't worth it," he said. "I'm going to give up taking so much."

"Come on inside. Soldier, give him a hand." A Patrolman hurried over and took one of the suitcases. The three men went inside and down the corridor to Harris' quarters. Harris unlocked the door and the Patrolman deposited his suitcase inside.

"Thanks," Harris said. He set the other down beside it. "It's good to be back, even for a little while."

"A little while?"

"I just came back to settle my affairs. I have to return to Y-3 tomorrow morning."

"Then you didn't solve the problem?"

"I solved it, but I haven't cured it. I'm going back and get to work right away. There's a lot to be done."

"But you found out what it is?"

"Yes. It was just what the men said. The Pipers."

"The Pipers do exist?"

"Yes." Harris nodded. "They do exist." He removed his coat and put it over the back of the chair. Then he went to the window and let it down. Warm spring air rushed into the room. He settled himself on the bed, leaning back.

"The Pipers exist, all right—in the minds of the Garrison crew! To the crew, the Pipers are real. The crew created them. It's a mass hypnosis, a group projection, and all the men there have it, to some degree."

"How did it start?"

"Those men on Y-3 were sent there because they were skilled, highly-trained men with exceptional ability. All their lives they've been schooled by complex modern society, fast tempo and high integration between people. Constant pressure toward some goal, some job to be done.

"Those men are put down suddenly on an asteroid where there are natives

living the most primitive of existence, completely vegetable lives. No concept of goal, no concept of purpose, and hence no ability to plan. The natives live the way the animals live, from day to day, sleeping, picking food from the trees. A kind of Garden-of-Eden existence, without struggle or conflict.''

''So? But—''

''Each of the Garrison crew sees the natives and unconsciously thinks of his own early life, when he was a child, when he had no worries, no responsibilities, before he joined modern society. A baby lying in the sun.

''But he can't admit this to himself! He can't admit that he might want to live like the natives, to lie and sleep all day. So he invents The Pipers, the idea of a mysterious group living in the woods who trap him, lead him into their kind of life. Then he can blame them, not himself. They 'teach' him to become a part of the woods.''

''What are you going to do? Have the woods burned?''

''No.'' Harris shook his head. ''That's not the answer; the woods are harmless. The answer is psychotherapy for the men. That's why I'm going right back, so I can begin work. They've got to be made to see that the Pipers are inside them, their own unconscious voices calling to them to give up their responsibilities. They've got to be made to realize that there are no Pipers, at least, not outside themselves. The woods are harmless and the natives have nothing to teach anyone. They're primitive savages, without even a written language. We're seeing a psychological projection by a whole Garrison of men who want to lay down their work and take it easy for a while.''

The room was silent.

''I see,'' Cox said presently. ''Well, it makes sense.'' He got to his feet. ''I hope you can do something with the men when you get back.''

''I hope so, too,'' Harris agreed. ''And I think I can. After all, it's just a question of increasing their self-awareness. When they have that the Pipers will vanish.''

Cox nodded. ''Well, you go ahead with your unpacking, Doc. I'll see you at dinner. And maybe before you leave, tomorrow.''

''Fine.''

Harris opened the door and the Commander went out into the hall. Harris closed the door after him and then went back across the room. He looked out the window for a moment, his hands in his pockets.

It was becoming evening, the air was turning cool. The sun was just setting as he watched, disappearing behind the buildings of the city surrounding the hospital. He watched it go down.

Then he went over to his two suitcases. He was tired, very tired from his

trip. A great weariness was beginning to descend over him. There were so many things to do, so terribly many. How could he hope to do them all? Back to the asteroid. And then what?

He yawned, his eyes closing. How sleepy he was! He looked over at the bed. Then he sat down on the edge of it and took his shoes off. So much to do, the next day.

He put his shoes in the corner of the room. Then he bent over, unsnapping one of the suitcases. He opened the suitcase. From it he took a bulging gunny-sack. Carefully, he emptied the contents of the sack out on the floor. Dirt, rich soft dirt. Dirt he had collected during his last hours there, dirt he had carefully gathered up.

When the dirt was spread out on the floor he sat down in the middle of it. He stretched himself out, leaning back. When he was fully comfortable he folded his hands across his chest and closed his eyes. So much work to do—But later on, of course. Tomorrow. How warm the dirt was....

He was sound asleep in a moment.

## POLICE OPERATION

*Hunting down the beast, under the best of circumstances, was dangerous. But in this little police operation, the conditions required the use of inadequate means!*

*"... there may be something in the nature of an occult police force, which operates to divert human suspicions, and to supply explanations that are good enough for whatever, somewhat in the nature of minds, human beings have—or that, if there be occult mischief makers and occult ravagers, they may be of a world also of other beings that are acting to check them, and to explain them, not benevolently, but to divert suspicion from themselves, because they, too, may be exploiting life upon this earth, but in ways more subtle, and in orderly, or organised, fashion."*

***Charles Fort: "LO!"***

John Strawmyer stood, an irate figure in faded overalls and sweat-whitened black shirt, apart from the others, his back to the weathered farm-buildings and the line of yellowing woods and the cirrus-streaked blue October sky. He thrust out a work-gnarled hand accusingly.

"That there heifer was worth two hund'rd, two hund'rd an' fifty dollars!" he clamored. "An' that there dog was just like one uh the fam'ly; An' now look at'm! I don't like t' use profane language, but you'ns gotta *do* some'n about this!"

Steve Parker, the district game protector, aimed his Leica at the carcass of the dog and snapped the shutter. "We're doing something about it," he said shortly. Then he stepped ten feet to the left and edged around the mangled heifer, choosing an angle for his camera shot.

The two men in the gray whipcords of the State police, seeing that Parker was through with the dog, moved in and squatted to examine it. The one with the triple chevrons on his sleeves took it by both forefeet and flipped it over on its back. It had been a big brute, of nondescript breed, with a rough black-and-brown coat. Something had clawed it deeply about the head, its throat was slashed transversely several times, and it had been disemboweled by a single slash that had opened its belly from breastbone to tail. They looked at it carefully, and then went

to stand beside Parker while he photographed the dead heifer. Like the dog, it had been talon-raked on either side of the head, and its throat had been slashed deeply several times. In addition, flesh had been torn from one flank in great strips.

"I can't kill a bear outa season, no!" Strawmyer continued his plaint. "But a bear comes an' kills my stock an' my dog; that there's all right! That's the kinda deal a farmer always gits, in this state! I don't like t' use profane language—"

"Then don't!" Parker barked at him, impatiently. "Don't use any kind of language. Just put in your claim and shut up!" He turned to the men in whipcords and gray Stetsons. "You boys seen everything?" he asked. "Then let's go."

They walked briskly back to the barnyard, Strawmyer following them, still vociferating about the wrongs of the farmer at the hands of a cynical and corrupt State government. They climbed into the State police car, the sergeant and the private in front and Parker into the rear, laying his camera on the seat beside a Winchester carbine.

"Weren't you pretty short with that fellow, back there, Steve?" the sergeant asked as the private started the car.

"Not too short. 'I don't like t' use profane language'," Parker mimicked the bereaved heifer owner, and then he went on to specify: "I'm morally certain that he's shot at least four illegal deer in the last year. When and if I ever get anything on him, he's going to be sorrier for himself then he is now."

"They're the characters that always beef their heads off," the sergeant agreed. "You think that whatever did this was the same as the others?"

"Yes. The dog must have jumped it while it was eating at the heifer. Same superficial scratches about the head, and deep cuts on the throat or belly. The bigger the animal, the farther front the big slashes occur. Evidently something grabs them by the head with front claws, and slashes with hind claws; that's why I think it's a bobcat."

"You know," the private said, "I saw a lot of wounds like that during the war. My outfit landed on Mindanao, where the guerrillas had been active. And this looks like bolo-work to me."

"The surplus-stores are full of machetes and jungle knives," the sergeant considered. "I think I'll call up Doc Winters, at the County Hospital, and see if all his squirrel-fodder is present and accounted for."

"But most of the livestock was eaten at, like the heifer," Parker objected.

"By definition, nuts have abnormal tastes," the sergeant replied. "Or the eating might have been done later, by foxes."

"I hope so; that'd let me out," Parker said.

"Ha, listen to the man!" the private howled, stopping the car at the end of the lane. "He thinks a nut with a machete and a Tarzan complex is just good clean

fun. Which way, now?"

"Well, let's see." The sergeant had unfolded a quadrangle sheet; the game protector leaned forward to look at it over his shoulder. The sergeant ran a finger from one to another of a series of variously colored crosses which had been marked on the map.

"Monday night, over here on Copperhead Mountain, that cow was killed," he said. "The next night, about ten o'clock, that sheepflock was hit, on this side of Copperhead, right about here. Early Wednesday night, that mule got slashed up in the woods back of the Weston farm. It was only slightly injured; must have kicked the whatzit and got away, but the whatzit wasn't too badly hurt, because a few hours later, it hit that turkey-flock on the Rhymer farm. And last night, it did that." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the Strawmyer farm. "See, following the ridges, working toward the southeast, avoiding open ground, killing only at night. Could be a bobcat, at that."

"Or Jink's maniac with the machete," Parker agreed. "Let's go up by Hindman's gap and see if we can see anything."

They turned, after a while, into a rutted dirt road, which deteriorated steadily into a grass-grown track through the woods. Finally, they stopped, and the private backed off the road. The three men got out; Parker with his Winchester, the sergeant checking the drum of a Thompson, and the private pumping a buckshot shell into the chamber of a riot gun. For half an hour, they followed the brush-grown trail beside the little stream; once, they passed a dark gray commercial-model jeep, backed to one side. Then they came to the head of the gap.

A man, wearing a tweed coat, tan field boots, and khaki breeches, was sitting on a log, smoking a pipe; he had a bolt-action rifle across his knees, and a pair of binoculars hung from his neck. He seemed about thirty years old, and any bobby-soxer's idol of the screen would have envied him the handsome regularity of his strangely immobile features. As Parker and the two State policemen approached, he rose, slinging his rifle, and greeted them.

"Sergeant Haines, isn't it?" he asked pleasantly. "Are you gentlemen out hunting the critter, too?"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lee. I thought that was your jeep I saw, down the road a little." The sergeant turned to the others. "Mr. Richard Lee; staying at the old Kinchwalter place, the other side of Rutter's Fort. This is Mr. Parker, the district game protector. And Private Zinkowski." He glanced at the rifle. "Are you out hunting for it, too?"

"Yes, I thought I might find something, up here. What do you think it is?"

"I don't know," the sergeant admitted. "It could be a bobcat. Canada lynx. Jink, here, has a theory that it's some escapee from the paper-doll factory, with a machete. Me, I hope not, but I'm not ignoring the possibility."

The man with the matinee-idol's face nodded. "It could be a lynx. I understand they're not unknown, in this section."

"We paid bounties on two in this county, in the last year," Parker said. "Odd rifle you have, there; mind if I look at it?"

"Not at all." The man who had been introduced as Richard Lee unslung and handed it over. "The chamber's loaded," he cautioned.

"I never saw one like this," Parker said. "Foreign?"

"I think so. I don't know anything about it; it belongs to a friend of mine, who loaned it to me. I think the action's German, or Czech; the rest of it's a custom job, by some West Coast gunmaker. It's chambered for some ultra-velocity wildcat load."

The rifle passed from hand to hand; the three men examined it in turn, commenting admiringly.

"You find anything, Mr. Lee?" the sergeant asked, handing it back.

"Not a trace." The man called Lee slung the rifle and began to dump the ashes from his pipe. "I was along the top of this ridge for about a mile on either side of the gap, and down the other side as far as Hindman's Run; I didn't find any tracks, or any indication of where it had made a kill."

The game protector nodded, turning to Sergeant Haines.

"There's no use us going any farther," he said. "Ten to one, it followed that line of woods back of Strawmyer's, and crossed over to the other ridge. I think our best bet would be the hollow at the head of Lowrie's Run. What do you think?"

The sergeant agreed. The man called Richard Lee began to refill his pipe methodically.

"I think I shall stay here for a while, but I believe you're right. Lowrie's Run, or across Lowrie's Gap into Coon Valley," he said.

After Parker and the State policemen had gone, the man whom they had addressed as Richard Lee returned to his log and sat smoking, his rifle across his knees. From time to time, he glanced at his wrist watch and raised his head to listen. At length, faint in the distance, he heard the sound of a motor starting.

Instantly, he was on his feet. From the end of the hollow log on which he had been sitting, he produced a canvas musette-bag. Walking briskly to a patch of damp ground beside the little stream, he leaned the rifle against a tree and opened the bag. First, he took out a pair of gloves of some greenish, rubberlike substance, and put them on, drawing the long gauntlets up over his coat sleeves. Then he produced a bottle and unscrewed the cap. Being careful to avoid splashing his clothes, he went about, pouring a clear liquid upon the ground in several places. Where he poured, white vapors rose, and twigs and grass grumbled into brownish dust. After he had replaced the cap and returned the bottle to the bag, he

waited for a few minutes, then took a spatula from the musette and dug where he had poured the fluid, prying loose four black, irregular-shaped lumps of matter, which he carried to the running water and washed carefully, before wrapping them and putting them in the bag, along with the gloves. Then he slung bag and rifle and started down the trail to where he had parked the jeep.

Half an hour later, after driving through the little farming village of Rutter's Fort, he pulled into the barnyard of a rundown farm and backed through the open doors of the barn. He closed the double doors behind him, and barred them from within. Then he went to the rear wall of the barn, which was much closer the front than the outside dimensions of the barn would have indicated.

He took from his pocket a black object like an automatic pencil. Hunting over the rough plank wall, he found a small hole and inserted the pointed end of the pseudo-pencil, pressing on the other end. For an instant, nothing happened. Then a ten-foot-square section of the wall receded two feet and slid noiselessly to one side. The section which had slid inward had been built of three-inch steel, masked by a thin covering of boards; the wall around it was two-foot concrete, similarly camouflaged. He stepped quickly inside.

Fumbling at the right side of the opening, he found a switch and flicked it. Instantly, the massive steel plate slid back into place with a soft, oily click. As it did, lights came on within the hidden room, disclosing a great semiglobe of some fine metallic mesh, thirty feet in diameter and fifteen in height. There was a sliding door at one side of this; the man called Richard Lee opened and entered through it, closing it behind him. Then he turned to the center of the hollow dome, where an armchair was placed in front of a small desk below a large instrument panel. The gauges and dials on the panel, and the levers and switches and buttons on the desk control board, were all lettered and numbered with characters not of the Roman alphabet or the Arabic notation, and, within instant reach of the occupant of the chair, a pistollike weapon lay on the desk. It had a conventional index-finger trigger and a hand-fit grip, but, instead of a tubular barrel, two slender parallel metal rods extended about four inches forward of the receiver, joined together at what would correspond to the muzzle by a streamlined knob of some light blue ceramic or plastic substance.

The man with the handsome immobile face deposited his rifle and musette on the floor beside the chair and sat down. First, he picked up the pistollike weapon and checked it, and then he examined the many instruments on the panel in front of him. Finally, he flicked a switch on the control board.

At once, a small humming began, from some point overhead. It wavered and shrilled and mounted in intensity, and then fell to a steady monotone. The dome about him flickered with a queer, cold iridescence, and slowly vanished. The hidden room vanished, and he was looking into the shadowy interior of a

deserted barn. The barn vanished; blue sky appeared above, streaked with wisps of high cirrus cloud. The autumn landscape flickered unreally. Buildings appeared and vanished, and other buildings came and went in a twinkling. All around him, half-seen shapes moved briefly and disappeared.

Once, the figure of a man appeared, inside the circle of the dome. He had an angry, brutal face, and he wore a black tunic piped with silver, and black breeches, and polished black boots, and there was an insignia, composed of a cross and thunderbolt, on his cap. He held an automatic pistol in his hand.

Instantly, the man at the desk snatched up his own weapon and thumbed off the safety, but before he could lift and aim it, the intruder stumbled and passed outside the force-field which surrounded the chair and instruments.

For a while, there were fires raging outside, and for a while, the man at the desk was surrounded by a great hall, with a high, vaulted ceiling, through which figures flitted and vanished. For a while, there were vistas of deep forests, always set in the same background of mountains and always under the same blue cirrus-laced sky. There was an interval of flickering blue-white light, of unbearable intensity. Then the man at the desk was surrounded by the interior of vast industrial works. The moving figures around him slowed, and became more distinct. For an instant, the man in the chair grinned as he found himself looking into a big washroom, where a tall blond girl was taking a shower bath, and a pert little redhead was vigorously drying herself with a towel. The dome grew visible, coruscating with many-colored lights and then the humming died and the dome became a cold and inert mesh of fine white metal. A green light above flashed on and off slowly.

He stabbed a button and flipped a switch, then got to his feet, picking up his rifle and musette and fumbling under his shirt for a small mesh bag, from which he took an inch-wide disk of blue plastic. Unlocking a container on the instrument panel, he removed a small roll of solidograph-film, which he stowed in his bag. Then he slid open the door and emerged into his own dimension of space-time.

Outside was a wide hallway, with a pale green floor, paler green walls, and a ceiling of greenish off-white. A big hole had been cut to accommodate the dome, and across the hallway a desk had been set up, and at it sat a clerk in a pale blue tunic, who was just taking the audio-plugs of a music-box out of his ears. A couple of policemen in green uniforms, with ultrasonic paralyzers dangling by thongs from their left wrists and bolstered sigma-ray needlers like the one on the desk inside the dome, were kidding with some girls in vivid orange and scarlet and green smocks. One of these, in bright green, was a duplicate of the one he had seen rubbing herself down with a towel.

"Here comes your boss-man," one of the girls told the cops, as he approached. They both turned and saluted casually. The man who had lately been

using the name of Richard Lee responded to their greeting and went to the desk. The policemen grasped their paralyzers, drew their needlers, and hurried into the dome.

Taking the disk of blue plastic from his packet, he handed it to the clerk at the desk, who dropped it into a slot in the voder in front of him. Instantly, a mechanical voice responded:

"Verkan Vall, blue-seal noble, hereditary Mavrad of Nerros. Special Chief's Assistant, Paratime Police, special assignment. Subject to no orders below those of Tortha Karf, Chief of Paratime Police. To be given all courtesies and co-operation within the Paratime Transposition Code and the Police Powers Code. Further particulars?"

The clerk pressed the "no"-button. The blue sigil fell out the release-slot and was handed back to its bearer, who was drawing up his left sleeve.

"You'll want to be sure I'm *your* Verkan Vall, I suppose?" he said, extending his arm.

"Yes, quite, sir."

The clerk touched his arm with a small instrument which swabbed it with antiseptic, drew a minute blood-sample, and medicated the needle prick, all in one almost painless operation. He put the blood-drop on a slide and inserted it at one side of a comparison microscope, nodding. It showed the same distinctive permanent colloid pattern as the sample he had ready for comparison; the colloid pattern given in infancy by injection to the man in front of him, to set him apart from all the myriad other Verkan Valls on every other probability-line of paratime.

"Right, sir," the clerk nodded.

The two policemen came out of the dome, their needlers holstered and their vigilance relaxed. They were lighting cigarettes as they emerged.

"It's all right, sir," one of them said. "You didn't bring anything in with you, this trip."

The other cop chuckled. "Remember that Fifth Level wild-man who came in on the freight conveyor at Jandar, last month?" he asked.

If he was hoping that some of the girls would want to know, what wild-man, it was a vain hope. With a blue-seal mavrad around, what chance did a couple of ordinary coppers have? The girls were already converging on Verkan Vall.

"When are you going to get that monstrosity out of our restroom," the little redhead in green coveralls was demanding. "If it wasn't for that thing, I'd be taking a shower, right now."

"You were just finishing one, about fifty paraseconds off, when I came through," Verkan Vall told her.

The girl looked at him in obviously feigned indignation.

"Why, you—You _parapeeper_!"

Verkan Vall chuckled and turned to the clerk. "I want a strato-rocket and pilot, for Dhergabar, right away. Call Dhergabar Paratime Police Field and give them my ETA; have an air-taxi meet me, and have the chief notified that I'm coming in. Extraordinary report. Keep a guard over the conveyor; I think I'm going to need it, again, soon." He turned to the little redhead. "Want to show me the way out of here, to the rocket field?" he asked.

Outside, on the open landing field, Verkan Vall glanced up at the sky, then looked at his watch. It had been twenty minutes since he had backed the jeep into the barn, on that distant other time-line; the same delicate lines of white cirrus were etched across the blue above. The constancy of the weather, even across two hundred thousand parayears of perpendicular time, never failed to impress him. The long curve of the mountains was the same, and they were mottled with the same autumn colors, but where the little village of Rutter's Fort stood on that other line of probability, the white towers of an apartment-city rose—the living quarters of the plant personnel.

The rocket that was to take him to headquarters was being hoisted with a crane and lowered into the firing-stand, and he walked briskly toward it, his rifle and musette slung. A boyish-looking pilot was on the platform, opening the door of the rocket; he stood aside for Verkan Vall to enter, then followed and closed it, dogging it shut while his passenger stowed his bag and rifle and strapped himself into a seat.

"Dhergabar Commercial Terminal, sir?" the pilot asked, taking the adjoining seat at the controls.

"Paratime Police Field, back of the Paratime Administration Building."

"Right, sir. Twenty seconds to blast, when you're ready."

"Ready now." Verkan Vall relaxed, counting seconds subconsciously.

The rocket trembled, and Verkan Vall felt himself being pushed gently back against the upholstery. The seats, and the pilot's instrument panel in front of them, swung on gimbals, and the finger of the indicator swept slowly over a ninety-degree arc as the rocket rose and leveled. By then, the high cirrus clouds Verkan Vall had watched from the field were far below; they were well into the stratosphere.

There would be nothing to do, now, for the three hours in which the rocket sped northward across the pole and southward to Dhergabar; the navigation was entirely in the electronic hands of the robot controls. Verkan Vall got out his pipe and lit it; the pilot lit a cigarette.

"That's an odd pipe, sir," the pilot said. "Out-time item?"

"Yes, Fourth Probability Level; typical of the whole paratime belt I was working in." Verkan Vall handed it over for inspection. "The bowl's natural brier-root;

the stem's a sort of plastic made from the sap of certain tropical trees. The little white dot is the maker's trademark; it's made of elephant tusk."

"Sounds pretty crude to me, sir." The pilot handed it back. "Nice workmanship, though. Looks like good machine production."

"Yes. The sector I was on is really quite advanced, for an electro-chemical civilization. That weapon I brought back with me—that solid-missile projector—is typical of most Fourth Level culture. Moving parts machined to the closest tolerances, and interchangeable with similar parts of all similar weapons. The missile is a small bolt of cupro-alloy coated lead, propelled by expanding gases from the ignition of some nitro-cellulose compound. Most of their scientific advance occurred within the past century, and most of that in the past forty years. Of course, the life-expectancy on that level is only about seventy years."

"Humph! I'm seventy-eight, last birthday," the boyish-looking pilot snorted. "Their medical science must be mostly witchcraft!"

"Until quite recently, it was," Verkan Vall agreed. "Same story there as in everything else—rapid advancement in the past few decades, after thousands of years of cultural inertia."

"You know, sir, I don't really understand this paratime stuff," the pilot confessed. "I know that all time is totally present, and that every moment has its own past-future line of event-sequence, and that all events in space-time occur according to maximum probability, but I just don't get this alternate probability stuff, at all. If something exists, it's because it's the maximum-probability effect of prior causes; why does anything else exist on any other time-line?"

Verkan Vall blew smoke at the air-renovator. A lecture on paratime theory would nicely fill in the three-hour interval until the landing at Dhergabar. At least, this kid was asking intelligent questions.

"Well, you know the principal of time-passage, I suppose?" he began.

"Yes, of course; Rhogom's Doctrine. The basis of most of our psychical science. We exist perpetually at all moments within our life-span; our extraphysical ego component passes from the ego existing at one moment to the ego existing at the next. During unconsciousness, the EPC is 'time-free'; it may detach, and connect at some other moment, with the ego existing at that time-point. That's how we precog. We take an autohypno and recover memories brought back from the future moment and buried in the subconscious mind."

"That's right," Verkan Vall told him. "And even without the autohypno, a lot of precognitive matter leaks out of the subconscious and into the conscious mind, usually in distorted forms, or else inspires 'instinctive' acts, the motivation for which is not brought to the level of consciousness. For instance, suppose, you're walking along North Promenade, in Dhergabar, and you come to the Martian Palace Café, and you go in for a drink, and meet some girl, and strike up an acquaintance

with her. This chance acquaintance develops into a love affair, and a year later, out of jealousy, she rays you half a dozen times with a needler."

"Just about that happened to a friend of mine, not long ago," the pilot said. "Go on, sir."

"Well, in the microsecond or so before you die—or afterward, for that matter, because we know that the extraphysical component survives physical destruction—your EPC slips back a couple of years, and re-connects at some point pastward of your first meeting with this girl, and carries with it memories of everything up to the moment of detachment, all of which are indelibly recorded in your subconscious mind. So, when you re-experience the event of standing outside the Martian Palace with a thirst, you go on to the Starway, or Nhergal's, or some other bar. In both cases, on both time-lines, you follow the line of maximum probability; in the second case, your subconscious future memories are an added causal factor."

"And when I back-slip, after I've been needled, I generate a new time-line? Is that it?"

Verkan Vall made a small sound of impatience. "No such thing!" he exclaimed. "It's semantically inadmissible to talk about the total presence of time with one breath and about generating new time-lines with the next. *All* time-lines are totally present, in perpetual co-existence. The theory is that the EPC passes from one moment, on one time-line, to the next moment on the next line, so that the true passage of the EPC from moment to moment is a two-dimensional diagonal. So, in the case we're using, the event of your going into the Martian Palace exists on one time-line, and the event of your passing along to the Starway exists on another, but both are events in real existence.

"Now, what we do, in paratime transposition, is to build up a hypertemporal field to include the time-line we want to reach, and then shift over to it. Same point in the plenum; same point in primary time—plus primary time elapsed during mechanical and electronic lag in the relays—but a different line of secondary time."

"Then why don't we have past-future time travel on our own time-line?" the pilot wanted to know.

That was a question every paratimer has to answer, every time he talks paratime to the laity. Verkan Vall had been expecting it; he answered patiently.

"The Ghaldron-Hesthor field-generator is like every other mechanism; it can operate only in the area of primary time in which it exists. It can transpose to any other time-line, and carry with it anything inside its field, but it can't go outside its own temporal area of existence, any more than a bullet from that rifle can hit the target a week before it's fired," Verkan Vall pointed out. "Anything inside the field is supposed to be unaffected by anything outside. *Supposed to be* is the way to put it; it doesn't always work. Once in a while, something pretty nasty gets

picked up in transit." He thought, briefly, of the man in the black tunic. "That's why we have armed guards at terminals."

"Suppose you pick up a blast from a nucleonic bomb," the pilot asked, "or something red-hot, or radioactive?"

"We have a monument, at Paratime Police Headquarters, in Dhergabar, bearing the names of our own personnel who didn't make it back. It's a large monument; over the past ten thousand years, it's been inscribed with quite a few names."

"You can have it; I'll stick to rockets!" the pilot replied. "Tell me another thing, though: What's all this about levels, and sectors, and belts? What's the difference?"

"Purely arbitrary terms. There are five main probability levels, derived from the five possible outcomes of the attempt to colonize this planet, seventy-five thousand years ago. We're on the First Level—complete success, and colony fully established. The Fifth Level is the probability of complete failure—no human population established on this planet, and indigenous quasi-human life evolved indigenously. On the Fourth Level, the colonists evidently met with some disaster and lost all memory of their extraterrestrial origin, as well as all extraterrestrial culture. As far as they know, they are an indigenous race; they have a long pre-history of stone-age savagery.

"Sectors are areas of paratime on any level in which the prevalent culture has a common origin and common characteristics. They are divided more or less arbitrarily into sub-sectors. Belts are areas within sub-sectors where conditions are the result of recent alternate probabilities. For instance, I've just come from the Europo-American Sector of the Fourth Level, an area of about ten thousand parayears in depth, in which the dominant civilization developed on the North-West Continent of the Major Land Mass, and spread from there to the Minor Land Mass. The line on which I was operating is also part of a sub-sector of about three thousand parayears' depth, and a belt developing from one of several probable outcomes of a war concluded about three elapsed years ago. On that time-line, the field at the Hagraban Synthetics Works, where we took off, is part of an abandoned farm; on the site of Hagraban City is a little farming village. Those things are there, right now, both in primary time and in the plenum. They are about two hundred and fifty thousand parayears perpendicular to each other, and each is of the same general order of reality."

The red light overhead flashed on. The pilot looked into his visor and put his hands to the manual controls, in case of failure of the robot controls. The rocket landed smoothly, however; there was a slight jar as it was grappled by the crane and hoisted upright, the seats turning in their gimbals. Pilot and passenger unstrapped themselves and hurried through the refrigerated outlet and away from

the glowing-hot rocket.

An air-taxi, emblazoned with the device of the Paratime Police, was waiting. Verkan Vall said good-by to the rocket-pilot and took his seat beside the pilot of the aircab; the latter lifted his vehicle above the building level and then set it down on the landing-stage of the Paratime Police Building in a long, side-swooping glide. An express elevator took Verkan Vall down to one of the middle stages, where he showed his sigil to the guard outside the door of Tortha Karf's office and was admitted at once.

The Paratime Police chief rose from behind his semicircular desk, with its array of keyboards and viewing-screens and communicators. He was a big man, well past his two hundredth year; his hair was iron-gray and thinning in front, he had begun to grow thick at the waist, and his calm features bore the lines of middle age. He wore the dark-green uniform of the Paratime Police.

"Well, Vall," he greeted. "Everything secure?"

"Not exactly, sir." Verkan Vall came around the desk, deposited his rifle and bag on the floor, and sat down in one of the spare chairs. "I'll have to go back again."

"So?" His chief lit a cigarette and waited.

"I traced Gavran Sarn." Verkan Vall got out his pipe and began to fill it. "But that's only the beginning. I have to trace something else. Gavran Sarn exceeded his Paratime permit, and took one of his pets along. A Venusian nighthound."

Tortha Karf's expression did not alter; it merely grew more intense. He used one of the short, semantically ugly terms which serve, in place of profanity, as the emotional release of a race that has forgotten all the taboos and terminologies of supernaturalistic religion and sex-inhibition.

"You're sure of this, of course." It was less a question than a statement.

Verkan Vall bent and took cloth-wrapped objects from his bag, unwrapping them and laying them on the desk. They were casts, in hard black plastic, of the footprints of some large three-toed animal.

"What do these look like, sir?" he asked.

Tortha Karf fingered them and nodded. Then he became as visibly angry as a man of his civilization and culture-level ever permitted himself.

"What does that fool think we have a Paratime Code for?" he demanded. "It's entirely illegal to transpose any extraterrestrial animal or object to any timeline on which space-travel is unknown. I don't care if he is a green-seal thavrad; he'll face charges, when he gets back, for this!"

"He *was* a green-seal thavrad," Verkan Vall corrected. "And he won't be coming back."

"I hope you didn't have to deal summarily with him," Tortha Karf said. "With

his title, and social position, and his family's political importance, that might make difficulties. Not that it wouldn't be all right with me, of course, but we never seem to be able to make either the Management or the public realize the extremities to which we are forced, at times." He sighed. "We probably never shall."

Verkan Vall smiled faintly. "Oh, no, sir; nothing like that. He was dead before I transposed to that time-line. He was killed when he wrecked a self-propelled vehicle he was using. One of those Fourth Level automobiles. I posed as a relative and tried to claim his body for the burial-ceremony observed on that cultural level, but was told that it had been completely destroyed by fire when the fuel tank of this automobile burned. I was given certain of his effects which had passed through the fire; I found his sigil concealed inside what appeared to be a cigarette case." He took a green disk from the bag and laid it on the desk. "There's no question; Gavran Sarn died in the wreck of that automobile."

"And the nighthound?"

"It was in the car with him, but it escaped. You know how fast those things are. I found that track"—he indicated one of the black casts—"in some dried mud near the scene of the wreck. As you see, the cast is slightly defective. The others were fresh this morning, when I made them."

"And what have you done so far?"

"I rented an old farm near the scene of the wreck, and installed my field-generator there. It runs through to the Hagraban Synthetics Works, about a hundred miles east of Thalna-Jarvizar. I have my this-line terminal in the girls' rest room at the durable plastics factory; handled that on a local police-power writ. Since then, I've been hunting for the nighthound. I think I can find it, but I'll need some special equipment, and a hypno-mech indoctrination. That's why I came back."

"Has it been attracting any attention?" Tortha Karf asked anxiously.

"Killing cattle in the locality; causing considerable excitement. Fortunately, it's a locality of forested mountains and valley farms, rather than a built-up industrial district. Local police and wild-game protection officers are concerned; all the farmers excited, and going armed. The theory is that it's either a wildcat of some sort, or a maniac armed with a cutlass. Either theory would conform, more or less, to the nature of its depredations. Nobody has actually seen it."

"That's good!" Tortha Karf was relieved. "Well, you'll have to go and bring it out, or kill it and obliterate the body. You know why, as well as I do."

"Certainly, sir," Verkan Vall replied. "In a primitive culture, things like this would be assigned supernatural explanations, and imbedded in the locally accepted religion. But this culture, while nominally religious, is highly rationalistic in practice. Typical lag-effect, characteristic of all expanding cultures. And this Europo-American Sector really has an expanding culture. A hundred and fifty years

ago, the inhabitants of this particular time-line didn't even know how to apply steam power; now they've begun to release nuclear energy, in a few crude forms."

Tortha Karf whistled, softly. "That's quite a jump. There's a sector that'll be in for trouble, in the next few centuries."

"That is realized, locally, sir." Verkan Vall concentrated on relighting his pipe, for a moment, then continued: "I would predict space-travel on that sector within the next century. Maybe the next half-century, at least to the Moon. And the art of taxidermy is very highly developed. Now, suppose some farmer shoots that thing; what would he do with it, sir?"

Tortha Karf grunted. "Nice logic, Vall. On a most uncomfortable possibility. He'd have it mounted, and it'd be put in a museum, somewhere. And as soon as the first spaceship reaches Venus, and they find those things in a wild state, they'll have the mounted specimen identified."

"Exactly. And then, instead of beating their brains about _where_ their specimen came from, they'll begin asking _when_ it came from. They're quite capable of such reasoning, even now."

"A hundred years isn't a particularly long time," Tortha Karf considered. "I'll be retired, then, but you'll have my job, and it'll be your headache. You'd better get this cleaned up, now, while it can be handled. What are you going to do?"

"I'm not sure, now, sir. I want a hypno-mech indoctrination, first." Verkan Vall gestured toward the communicator on the desk. "May I?" he asked.

"Certainly." Tortha Karf slid the instrument across the desk. "Anything you want."

"Thank you, sir." Verkan Vall snapped on the code-index, found the symbol he wanted, and then punched it on the keyboard. "Special Chief's Assistant Verkan Vall," he identified himself. "Speaking from office of Tortha Karf, Chief Paratime Police. I want a complete hypno-mech on Venusian nighthounds, emphasis on wild state, special emphasis domesticated nighthounds reverted to wild state in terrestrial surroundings, extra-special emphasis hunting techniques applicable to same. The word 'nighthound' will do for trigger-symbol." He turned to Tortha Karf. "Can I take it here?"

Tortha Karf nodded, pointing to a row of booths along the far wall of the office.

"Make set-up for wired transmission; I'll take it here."

"Very well, sir; in fifteen minutes," a voice replied out of the communicator.

Verkan Vall slid the communicator back. "By the way, sir; I had a hitchhiker, on the way back. Carried him about a hundred or so parayears; picked him up about three hundred parayears after leaving my other-line terminal. Nasty-

looking fellow, in a black uniform; looked like one of these private-army storm troopers you find all through that sector. Armed, and hostile. I thought I'd have to ray him, but he blundered outside the field almost at once. I have a record, if you'd care to see it."

"Yes, put it on," Tortha Karf gestured toward the solidograph-projector. "It's set for miniature reproduction here on the desk; that be all right?"

Verkan Vall nodded, getting out the film and loading it into the projector. When he pressed a button, a dome of radiance appeared on the desk top; two feet in width and a foot in height. In the middle of this appeared a small solidograph image of the interior of the conveyor, showing the desk, and the control board, and the figure of Verkan Vall seated at it. The little figure of the storm trooper appeared, pistol in hand. The little Verkan Vall snatched up his tiny needler; the storm trooper moved into one side of the dome and vanished.

Verkan Vall flipped a switch and cut out the image.

"Yes. I don't know what causes that, but it happens, now and then," Tortha Karf said. "Usually at the beginning of a transposition. I remember, when I was just a kid, about a hundred and fifty years ago—a hundred and thirty-nine, to be exact—I picked up a fellow on the Fourth Level, just about where you're operating, and dragged him a couple of hundred parayears. I went back to find him and return him to his own time-line, but before I could locate him, he'd been arrested by the local authorities as a suspicious character, and got himself shot trying to escape. I felt badly about that, but—" Tortha Karf shrugged. "Anything else happen on the trip?"

"I ran through a belt of intermittent nucleonic bombing on the Second Level." Verkan Vall mentioned an approximate paratime location.

"Aaagh! That Khiftan civilization—by courtesy so called!" Tortha Karf pulled a wry face. "I suppose the intra-family enmities of the Hvadka Dynasty have reached critical mass again. They'll fool around till they blast themselves back to the stone age."

"Intellectually, they're about there, now. I had to operate in that sector, once—Oh, yes, another thing, sir. This rifle." Verkan Vall picked it up, emptied the magazine, and handed it to his superior. "The supplies office slipped up on this; it's not appropriate to my line of operation. It's a lovely rifle, but it's about two hundred percent in advance of existing arms design on my line. It excited the curiosity of a couple of police officers and a game-protector, who should be familiar with the weapons of their own time-line. I evaded by disclaiming ownership or intimate knowledge, and they seemed satisfied, but it worried me."

"Yes. That was made in our duplicating shops, here in Dhergabar." Tortha Karf carried it to a photographic bench, behind his desk. "I'll have it checked, while you're taking your hypno-mech. Want to exchange it for something authen-

tic?"

"Why, no, sir. It's been identified to me, and I'd excite less suspicion with it than I would if I abandoned it and mysteriously acquired another rifle. I just wanted a check, and Supplies warned to be more careful in future."

Tortha Karf nodded approvingly. The young Mavrad of Nerros was thinking as a paratimer should.

"What's the designation of your line, again?"

Verkan Vall told him. It was a short numerical term of six places, but it expressed a number of the order of ten to the fortieth power, exact to the last digit. Tortha Karf repeated it into his stenomemograph, with explanatory comment.

"There seems to be quite a few things going wrong, in that area," he said. "Let's see, now."

He punched the designation on a keyboard; instantly, it appeared on a translucent screen in front of him. He punched another combination, and, at the top of the screen, under the number, there appeared:

EVENTS, PAST ELAPSED FIVE YEARS.

He punched again; below this line appeared the sub-heading:

EVENTS INVOLVING PARATIME TRANSPOSITION.

Another code-combination added a third line:

(ATTRACTING PUBLIC NOTICE AMONG INHABITANTS.)

He pressed the "start"-button; the headings vanished, to be replaced by page after page of print, succeeding one another on the screen as the two men read. They told strange and apparently disconnected stories—of unexplained fires and explosions; of people vanishing without trace; of unaccountable disasters to aircraft. There were many stories of an epidemic of mysterious disk-shaped objects seen in the sky, singly or in numbers. To each account was appended one or more reference-numbers. Sometimes Tortha Karf or Verkan Vall would punch one of these, and read, on an adjoining screen, the explanatory matter referred to.

Finally Tortha Karf leaned back and lit a fresh cigarette.

"Yes, indeed, Vall; very definitely we will have to take action in the matter of the runaway nighthound of the late Gavran Sarn," he said. "I'd forgotten that that was the time-line onto which the *Ardrath* expedition launched those antigrav disks. If this extraterrestrial monstrosity turns up, on the heels of that 'Flying Saucer' business, everybody above the order of intelligence of a cretin will suspect some connection."

"What really happened, in the *Ardrath* matter?" Verkan Vall inquired. "I was on the Third Level, on that Luvarian Empire operation, at the time."

"That's right; you missed that. Well, it was one of these joint-operation things. The Paratime Commission and the Space Patrol were experimenting with a new

technique for throwing a spaceship into paratime. They used the cruiser *Ardrath*, Kalzarn Jann commanding. Went into space about halfway to the Moon and took up orbit, keeping on the sunlit side of the planet to avoid being observed. That was all right. But then, Captain Kalzarn ordered away a flight of antigrav disks, fully manned, to take pictures, and finally authorized a landing in the western mountain range, Northern Continent, Minor Land-Mass. That's when the trouble started."

He flipped the run-back switch, till he had recovered the page he wanted. Verkan Vall read of a Fourth Level aviator, in his little airscrew-drive craft, sighting nine high-flying saucerlike objects.

"That was how it began," Tortha Karf told him. "Before long, as other incidents of the same sort occurred, our people on that line began sending back to know what was going on. Naturally, from the different descriptions of these 'saucers', they recognized the objects as antigrav landing-disks from a spaceship. So I went to the Commission and raised atomic blazes about it, and the ***Ardrath*** was ordered to confine operations to the lower areas of the Fifth Level. Then our people on that time-line went to work with corrective action. Here."

He wiped the screen and then began punching combinations. Page after page appeared, bearing accounts of people who had claimed to have seen the mysterious disks, and each report was more fantastic than the last.

"The standard smother-out technique," Verkan Vall grinned. "I only heard a little talk about the 'Flying Saucers', and all of that was in joke. In that order of culture, you can always discredit one true story by setting up ten others, palpably false, parallel to it—Wasn't that the time-line the Tharmax Trading Corporation almost lost their paratime license on?"

"That's right; it was! They bought up all the cigarettes, and caused a conspicuous shortage, after Fourth Level cigarettes had been introduced on this line and had become popular. They should have spread their purchases over a number of lines, and kept them within the local supply-demand frame. And they also got into trouble with the local government for selling unrationed petrol and automobile tires. We had to send in a special-operations group, and they came closer to having to engage in out-time local politics than I care to think of." Tortha Karf quoted a line from a currently popular song about the sorrows of a policeman's life. "We're jugglers, Vall; trying to keep our traders and sociological observers and tourists and plain idiots like the late Gavran Sarn out of trouble; trying to prevent panics and disturbances and dislocations of local economy as a result of our operations; trying to keep out of out-time politics—and, at all times, at all costs and hazards, by all means, guarding the secret of paratime transposition. Sometimes I wish Ghaldron Karf and Hesthor Ghrom had strangled in their cradles!"

Verkan Vall shook his head. "No, chief," he said. "You don't mean that; not

really," he said. "We've been paratiming for the past ten thousand years. When the Ghaldron-Hesthor trans-temporal field was discovered, our ancestors had pretty well exhausted the resources of this planet. We had a world population of half a billion, and it was all they could do to keep alive. After we began paratime transposition, our population climbed to ten billion, and there it stayed for the last eight thousand years. Just enough of us to enjoy our planet and the other planets of the system to the fullest; enough of everything for everybody that nobody needs fight anybody for anything. We've tapped the resources of those other worlds on other time-lines, a little here, a little there, and not enough to really hurt anybody. We've left our mark in a few places—the Dakota Badlands, and the Gobi, on the Fourth Level, for instance—but we've done no great damage to any of them."

"Except the time they blew up half the Southern Island Continent, over about five hundred parayears on the Third Level," Tortha Karf mentioned.

"Regrettable accident, to be sure," Verkan Vall conceded. "And look how much we've learned from the experiences of those other time-lines. During the Crisis, after the Fourth Interplanetary War, we might have adopted Palnar Sarn's 'Dictatorship of the Chosen' scheme, if we hadn't seen what an exactly similar scheme had done to the Jak-Hakka Civilization, on the Second Level. When Palnar Sarn was told about that, he went into paratime to see for himself, and when he returned, he renounced his proposal in horror."

Tortha Karf nodded. He wouldn't be making any mistake in turning his post over to the Mavrad of Nerros on his retirement.

"Yes, Vall; I know," he said. "But when you've been at this desk as long as I have, you'll have a sour moment or two, now and then, too."

A blue light flashed over one of the booths across the room. Verkan Vall got to his feet, removing his coat and hanging it on the back of his chair, and crossed the room, rolling up his left shirt sleeve. There was a relaxer-chair in the booth, with a blue plastic helmet above it. He glanced at the indicator-screen to make sure he was getting the indoctrination he called for, and then sat down in the chair and lowered the helmet over his head, inserting the ear plugs and fastening the chin strap. Then he touched his left arm with an injector which was lying on the arm of the chair, and at the same time flipped the starter switch.

Soft, slow music began to chant out of the earphones. The insidious fingers of the drug blocked off his senses, one by one. The music diminished, and the words of the hypnotic formula lulled him to sleep.

He woke, hearing the lively strains of dance music. For a while, he lay relaxed. Then he snapped off the switch, took out the ear plugs, removed the helmet and rose to his feet. Deep in his subconscious mind was the entire body of knowledge about the Venusian nighthound. He mentally pronounced the word, and at once it began flooding into his conscious mind. He knew the animal's evo-

lutionary history, its anatomy, its characteristics, its dietary and reproductive habits, how it hunted, how it fought its enemies, how it eluded pursuit, and how best it could be tracked down and killed. He nodded. Already, a plan for dealing with Gavran Sarn's renegade pet was taking shape in his mind.

He picked a plastic cup from the dispenser, filled it from a cooler-tap with amber-colored spiced wine, and drank, tossing the cup into the disposal-bin. He placed a fresh injector on the arm of the chair, ready for the next user of the booth. Then he emerged, glancing at his Fourth Level wrist watch and mentally translating to the First Level time-scale. Three hours had passed; there had been more to learn about his quarry than he had expected.

Tortha Karf was sitting behind his desk, smoking a cigarette. It seemed as though he had not moved since Verkan Vall had left him, though the special agent knew that he had dined, attended several conferences, and done many other things.

"I checked up on your hitchhiker, Vall," the chief said. "We won't bother about him. He's a member of something called the Christian Avengers—one of those typical Europo-American race-and-religious hate groups. He belongs in a belt that is the outcome of the Hitler victory of 1940, whatever that was. Something unpleasant, I daresay. We don't owe him anything; people of that sort should be stepped on, like cockroaches. And he won't make any more trouble on the line where you dropped him than they have there already. It's in a belt of complete social and political anarchy; somebody probably shot him as soon as he emerged, because he wasn't wearing the right sort of a uniform. Nineteen-forty what, by the way?"

"Elapsed years since the birth of some religious leader," Verkan Vall explained. "And did you find out about my rifle?"

"Oh, yes. It's reproduction of something that's called a Sharp's Model '37 .235 Ultraspeed-Express. Made on an adjoining paratime belt by a company that went out of business sixty-seven years ago, elapsed time, on your line of operation. What made the difference was the Second War Between The States. I don't know what that was, either—I'm not too well up on Fourth Level history—but whatever, your line of operation didn't have it. Probably just as well for them, though they very likely had something else, as bad or worse. I put in a complaint to Supplies about it, and got you some more ammunition and reloading tools. Now, tell me what you're going to do about this nighthound business."

Tortha Karf was silent for a while, after Verkan Vall had finished.

"You're taking some awful chances, Vall," he said, at length. "The way you plan doing it, the advantages will all be with the nighthound. Those things can see as well at night as you can in daylight. I suppose you know that, though; you're the nighthound specialist, now."

"Yes. But they're accustomed to the Venus hotland marshes; it's been dry weather for the last two weeks, all over the northeastern section of the Northern Continent. I'll be able to hear it, long before it gets close to me. And I'll be wearing an electric headlamp. When I snap that on, it'll be dazzled, for a moment."

"Well, as I said, you're the nighthound specialist. There's the communicator; order anything you need." He lit a fresh cigarette from the end of the old one before crushing it out. "But be careful, Vall. It took me close to forty years to make a paratimer out of you; I don't want to have to repeat the process with somebody else before I can retire."

The grass was wet as Verkan Vall—who reminded himself that here he was called Richard Lee—crossed the yard from the farmhouse to the ramshackle barn, in the early autumn darkness. It had been raining that morning when the stratorocket from Dhergabar had landed him at the Hagraban Synthetics Works, on the First Level; unaffected by the probabilities of human history, the same rain had been coming down on the old Kinchwalter farm, near Rutter's Fort, on the Fourth Level. And it had persisted all day, in a slow, deliberate drizzle.

He didn't like that. The woods would be wet, muffling his quarry's footsteps, and canceling his only advantage over the night-prowler he hunted. He had no idea, however, of postponing the hunt. If anything, the rain had made it all the more imperative that the nighthound be killed at once. At this season, a falling temperature would speedily follow. The nighthound, a creature of the hot Venus marshes, would suffer from the cold, and, taught by years of domestication to find warmth among human habitations, it would invade some isolated farmhouse, or, worse, one of the little valley villages. If it were not killed tonight, the incident he had come to prevent would certainly occur.

Going to the barn, he spread an old horse blanket on the seat of the jeep, laid his rifle on it, and then backed the jeep outside. Then he took off his coat, removing his pipe and tobacco from the pockets, and spread it on the wet grass. He unwrapped a package and took out a small plastic spray-gun he had brought with him from the First Level, aiming it at the coat and pressing the trigger until it blew itself empty. A sickening, rancid fetor tainted the air—the scent of the giant poison-roach of Venus, the one creature for which the nighthound bore an inborn, implacable hatred. It was because of this compulsive urge to attack and kill the deadly poison-roach that the first human settlers on Venus, long millennia ago, had domesticated the ugly and savage nighthound. He remembered that the Gavran family derived their title from their vast Venus hotlands estates; that Gavran Sarn, the man who had brought this thing to the Fourth Level, had been born on the inner planet. When Verkan Vall donned that coat, he would become his own living bait for the murderous fury of the creature he sought. At the moment, mastering his queasiness and putting on the coat, he objected less to that danger than

to the hideous stench of the scent, to obtain which a valuable specimen had been sacrificed at the Dhergabar Museum of Extraterrestrial Zoology, the evening before.

Carrying the wrapper and the spray-gun to an outside fireplace, he snapped his lighter to them and tossed them in. They were highly inflammable, blazing up and vanishing in a moment. He tested the electric headlamp on the front of his cap; checked his rifle; drew the heavy revolver, an authentic product of his line of operation, and flipped the cylinder out and in again. Then he got into the jeep and drove away.

For half an hour, he drove quickly along the valley roads. Now and then, he passed farmhouses, and dogs, puzzled and angered by the alien scent his coat bore, barked furiously. At length, he turned into a back road, and from this to the barely discernible trace of an old log road. The rain had stopped, and, in order to be ready to fire in any direction at any time, he had removed the top of the jeep. Now he had to crouch below the windshield to avoid overhanging branches. Once three deer—a buck and two does—stopped in front of him and stared for a moment, then bounded away with a flutter of white tails.

He was driving slowly, now; laying behind him a reeking trail of scent. There had been another stock-killing, the night before, while he had been on the First Level. The locality of this latest depredation had confirmed his estimate of the beast's probable movements, and indicated where it might be prowling, tonight. He was certain that it was somewhere near; sooner or later, it would pick up the scent.

Finally, he stopped, snapping out his lights. He had chosen this spot carefully, while studying the Geological Survey map, that afternoon; he was on the grade of an old railroad line, now abandoned and its track long removed, which had served the logging operations of fifty years ago. On one side, the mountain slanted sharply upward; on the other, it fell away sharply. If the nighthound were below him, it would have to climb that forty-five degree slope, and could not avoid dislodging loose stones, or otherwise making a noise. He would get out on that side; if the nighthound were above him, the jeep would protect him when it charged. He got to the ground, thumbing off the safety of his rifle, and an instant later he knew that he had made a mistake which could easily cost him his life; a mistake from which neither his comprehensive logic nor his hypnotically acquired knowledge of the beast's habits had saved him.

As he stepped to the ground, facing toward the front of the jeep, he heard a low, whining cry behind him, and a rush of padded feet. He whirled, snapping on the headlamp with his left hand and thrusting out his rifle pistol-wise in his right. For a split second, he saw the charging animal, its long, lizardlike head split in a toothy grin, its talon-tipped fore-paws extended.

He fired, and the bullet went wild. The next instant, the rifle was knocked from his hand. Instinctively, he flung up his left arm to shield his eyes. Claws raked his left arm and shoulder, something struck him heavily along the left side, and his cap-light went out as he dropped and rolled under the jeep, drawing in his legs and fumbling under his coat for the revolver.

In that instant, he knew what had gone wrong. His plan had been entirely too much of a success. The nighthound had winded him as he had driven up the old railroad-grade, and had followed. Its best running speed had been just good enough to keep it a hundred or so feet behind the jeep, and the motor-noise had covered the padding of its feet. In the few moments between stopping the little car and getting out, the nighthound had been able to close the distance and spring upon him.

It was characteristic of First-Level mentality that Verkan Vall wasted no moments on self-reproach or panic. While he was still rolling under his jeep, his mind had been busy with plans to retrieve the situation. Something touched the heel of one boot, and he froze his leg into immobility, at the same time trying to get the big Smith & Wesson free. The shoulder-holster, he found, was badly torn, though made of the heaviest skirting-leather, and the spring which retained the weapon in place had been wrenched and bent until he needed both hands to draw. The eight-inch slashing-claw of the nighthound's right intermediary limb had raked him; only the instinctive motion of throwing up his arm, and the fact that he wore the revolver in a shoulder-holster, had saved his life.

The nighthound was prowling around the jeep, whining frantically. It was badly confused. It could see quite well, even in the close darkness of the starless night; its eyes were of a nature capable of perceiving infrared radiations as light. There were plenty of these; the jeep's engine, lately running on four-wheel drive, was quite hot. Had he been standing alone, especially on this raw, chilly night, Verkan Vall's own body-heat would have lighted him up like a jack-o'-lantern. Now, however, the hot engine above him masked his own radiations. Moreover, the poison-roach scent on his coat was coming up through the floor board and mingling with the scent on the seat, yet the nighthound couldn't find the two-and-a-half foot insectlike thing that should have been producing it. Verkan Vall lay motionless, wondering how long the next move would be in coming. Then he heard a thud above him, followed by a furious tearing as the nighthound ripped the blanket and began rending at the seat cushion.

"Hope it gets a paw-full of seat-springs," Verkan Vall commented mentally. He had already found a stone about the size of his two fists, and another slightly smaller, and had put one in each of the side pockets of the coat. Now he slipped his revolver into his waist-belt and writhed out of the coat, shedding the ruined shoulder-holster at the same time. Wriggling on the flat of his back, he squirmed

between the rear wheels, until he was able to sit up, behind the jeep. Then, swinging the weighted coat, he flung it forward, over the nighthound and the jeep itself, at the same time drawing his revolver.

Immediately, the nighthound, lured by the sudden movement of the principal source of the scent, jumped out of the jeep and bounded after the coat, and there was considerable noise in the brush on the lower side of the railroad grade. At once, Verkan Vall swarmed into the jeep and snapped on the lights.

His stratagem had succeeded beautifully. The stinking coat had landed on the top of a small bush, about ten feet in front of the jeep and ten feet from the ground. The nighthound, erect on its haunches, was reaching out with its front paws to drag it down, and slashing angrily at it with its single-clawed intermediary limbs. Its back was to Verkan Vall.

His sights clearly defined by the lights in front of him, the paratimer centered them on the base of the creature's spine, just above its secondary shoulders, and carefully squeezed the trigger. The big .357 Magnum bucked in his hand and belched flame and sound—if only these Fourth Level weapons weren't so confoundedly boisterous!—and the nighthound screamed and fell. Recocking the revolver, Verkan Vall waited for an instant, then nodded in satisfaction. The beast's spine had been smashed, and its hind quarters, and even its intermediary fighting limbs had been paralyzed. He aimed carefully for a second shot and fired into the base of the thing's skull. It quivered and died.

Getting a flashlight, he found his rifle, sticking muzzle-down in the mud a little behind and to the right of the jeep, and swore briefly in the local Fourth Level idiom, for Verkan Vall was a man who loved good weapons, be they sigma-ray needlers, neutron-disruption blasters, or the solid-missile projectors of the lower levels. By this time, he was feeling considerable pain from the claw-wounds he had received. He peeled off his shirt and tossed it over the hood of the jeep.

Tortha Karf had advised him to carry a needler, or a blaster, or a neurostat-gun, but Verkan Vall had been unwilling to take such arms onto the Fourth Level. In event of mishap to himself, it would be all too easy for such a weapon to fall into the hands of someone able to deduce from it scientific principles too far in advance of the general Fourth Level culture. But there had been one First Level item which he had permitted himself, mainly because, suitably packaged, it was not readily identifiable as such. Digging a respectable Fourth-Level leatherette case from under the seat, he opened it and took out a pint bottle with a red poison-label, and a towel. Saturating the towel with the contents of the bottle, he rubbed every inch of his torso with it, so as not to miss even the smallest break made in his skin by the septic claws of the nighthound. Whenever the lotion-soaked towel touched raw skin, a pain like the burn of a hot iron shot through him; before he was through, he was in agony. Satisfied that he had disinfected every wound, he

dropped the towel and clung weakly to the side of the jeep. He grunted out a string of English oaths, and capped them with an obscene Spanish blasphemy he had picked up among the Fourth Level inhabitants of his island home of Nerros, to the south, and a thundering curse in the name of Mogga, Fire-God of Dool, in a Third-Level tongue. He mentioned Fasif, Great God of Khift, in a manner which would have got him an acid-bath if the Khiftan priests had heard him. He alluded to the baroque amatory practices of the Third-Level Illyalla people, and soothed himself, in the classical Dar-Halma tongue, with one of those rambling genealogical insults favored in the Indo-Turanian Sector of the Fourth Level.

By this time, the pain had subsided to an over-all smarting itch. He'd have to bear with that until his work was finished and he could enjoy a hot bath. He got another bottle out of the first-aid kit—a flat pint, labeled "Old Overholt," containing a locally-manufactured specific for inward and subjective wounds—and medicated himself copiously from it, corking it and slipping it into his hip pocket against future need. He gathered up the ruined shoulder-holster and threw it under the back seat. He put on his shirt. Then he went and dragged the dead nighthound onto the grade by its stumpy tail.

It was an ugly thing, weighing close to two hundred pounds, with powerfully muscled hind legs which furnished the bulk of its motive-power, and sturdy three-clawed front legs. Its secondary limbs, about a third of the way back from its front shoulders, were long and slender; normally, they were carried folded closely against the body, and each was armed with a single curving claw. The revolver-bullet had gone in at the base of the skull and emerged under the jaw; the head was relatively undamaged. Verkan Vall was glad of that; he wanted that head for the trophy-room of his home on Nerros. Grunting and straining, he got the thing into the back of the jeep, and flung his almost shredded tweed coat over it.

A last look around assured him that he had left nothing unaccountable or suspicious. The brush was broken where the nighthound had been tearing at the coat; a bear might have done that. There were splashes of the viscid stuff the thing had used for blood, but they wouldn't be there long. Terrestrial rodents liked nighthound blood, and the woods were full of mice. He climbed in under the wheel, backed, turned, and drove away.

Inside the paratime-transposition dome, Verkan Vall turned from the body of the nighthound, which he had just dragged in, and considered the inert form of another animal—a stump-tailed, tuft-eared, tawny Canada lynx. That particular animal had already made two paratime transpositions; captured in the vast wilderness of Fifth-Level North America, it had been taken to the First Level and placed in the Dhergabar Zoological Gardens, and then, requisitioned on the authority of Tortha Karf, it had been brought to the Fourth Level by Verkan Vall. It was almost

at the end of all its travels.

Verkan Vall prodded the supine animal with the toe of his boot; it twitched slightly. Its feet were cross-bound with straps, but when he saw that the narcotic was wearing off, Verkan Vall snatched a syringe, parted the fur at the base of its neck, and gave it an injection. After a moment, he picked it up in his arms and carried it out to the jeep.

"All right, pussy cat," he said, placing it under the rear seat, "this is the one-way ride. The way you're doped up, it won't hurt a bit."

He went back and rummaged in the debris of the long-deserted barn. He picked up a hoe, and discarded it as too light. An old plowshare was too unhandy. He considered a grate-bar from a heating furnace, and then he found the poleax, lying among a pile of wormeaten boards. Its handle had been shortened, at some time, to about twelve inches, converting it into a heavy hatchet. He weighed it, and tried it on a block of wood, and then, making sure that the secret door was closed, he went out again and drove off.

An hour later, he returned. Opening the secret door, he carried the ruined shoulder holster, and the straps that had bound the bobcat's feet, and the ax, now splotched with blood and tawny cat-hairs, into the dome. Then he closed the secret room, and took a long drink from the bottle on his hip.

The job was done. He would take a hot bath, and sleep in the farmhouse till noon, and then he would return to the First Level. Maybe Tortha Karf would want him to come back here for a while. The situation on this time-line was far from satisfactory, even if the crisis threatened by Gavran Sarn's renegade pet had been averted. The presence of a chief's assistant might be desirable.

At least, he had a right to expect a short vacation. He thought of the little redhead at the Hagraban Synthetics Works. What was her name? Something Kara—Morvan Kara; that was it. She'd be coming off shift about the time he'd make First Level, tomorrow afternoon.

The claw-wounds were still smarting vexatiously. A hot bath, and a night's sleep—He took another drink, lit his pipe, picked up his rifle and started across the yard to the house.

Private Zinkowski cradled the telephone and got up from the desk, stretching. He left the orderly-room and walked across the hall to the recreation room, where the rest of the boys were loafing. Sergeant Haines, in a languid gin-rummy game with Corporal Conner, a sheriff's deputy, and a mechanic from the service station down the road, looked up.

"Well, Sarge, I think we can write off those stock-killings," the private said.

"Yeah?" The sergeant's interest quickened.

"Yeah. I think the whatzit's had it. I just got a buzz from the railroad cops at Logansport. It seems a track-walker found a dead bobcat on the Logan River

branch, about a mile or so below MMY signal tower. Looks like it tangled with that night freight up-river, and came off second best. It was near chopped to hamburger."

"MMY signal tower; that's right below Yoder's Crossing," the sergeant considered. "The Strawmyer farm night-before-last, the Amrine farm last night—Yeah, that would be about right."

"That'll suit Steve Parker; bobcats aren't protected, so it's not his trouble. And they're not a violation of state law, so it's none of our worry," Conner said. "Your deal, isn't it, Sarge?"

"Yeah. Wait a minute." The sergeant got to his feet. "I promised Sam Kane, the AP man at Logansport, that I'd let him in on anything new." He got up and started for the phone. "Phantom Killer!" He blew an impolite noise.

"Well, it was a lot of excitement, while it lasted," the deputy sheriff said. "Just like that Flying Saucer thing."

## PROJECT MASTODON

The chief of protocol said, "Mr. Hudson of—ah—Mastodonia."

The secretary of state held out his hand. "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Hudson. I understand you've been here several times."

"That's right," said Hudson. "I had a hard time making your people believe I was in earnest."

"And are you, Mr. Hudson?"

"Believe me, sir, I would not try to fool you."

"And this Mastodonia," said the secretary, reaching down to tap the document upon the desk. "You will pardon me, but I've never heard of it."

"It's a new nation," Hudson explained, "but quite legitimate. We have a constitution, a democratic form of government, duly elected officials, and a code of laws. We are a free, peace-loving people and we are possessed of a vast amount of natural resources and—"

"Please tell me, sir," interrupted the secretary, "just where are you located?"

"Technically, you are our nearest neighbors."

"But that is ridiculous!" exploded Protocol.

"Not at all," insisted Hudson. "If you will give me a moment, Mr. Secretary, I have considerable evidence."

He brushed the fingers of Protocol off his sleeve and stepped forward to the desk, laying down the portfolio he carried.

"Go ahead, Mr. Hudson," said the secretary. "Why don't we all sit down and be comfortable while we talk this over?"

"You have my credentials, I see. Now here is a propos—"

"I have a document signed by a certain Wesley Adams."

"He's our first president," said Hudson. "Our George Washington, you might say."

"What is the purpose of this visit, Mr. Hudson?"

"We'd like to establish diplomatic relations. We think it would be to our mutual benefit. After all, we are a sister republic in perfect sympathy with your policies and aims. We'd like to negotiate trade agreements and we'd be grateful for some Point Four aid."

The secretary smiled. "Naturally. Who doesn't?"

"We're prepared to offer something in return," Hudson told him stiffly. "For one thing, we could offer sanctuary."

"Sanctuary!"

"I understand," said Hudson, "that in the present state of international tensions, a foolproof sanctuary is not something to be sneezed at."

The secretary turned stone cold. "I'm an extremely busy man."

Protocol took Hudson firmly by the arm. "Out you go."

General Leslie Bowers put in a call to State and got the secretary.

"I don't like to bother you, Herb," he said, "but there's something I want to check. Maybe you can help me."

"Glad to help you if I can."

"There's a fellow hanging around out here at the Pentagon, trying to get in to see me. Said I was the only one he'd talk to, but you know how it is."

"I certainly do."

"Name of Huston or Hudson or something like that."

"He was here just an hour or so ago," said the secretary. "Crackpot sort of fellow."

"He's gone now?"

"Yes. I don't think he'll be back."

"Did he say where you could reach him?"

"No, I don't believe he did."

"How did he strike you? I mean what kind of impression did you get of him?"

"I told you. A crackpot."

"I suppose he is. He said something to one of the colonels that got me worrying. Can't pass up anything, you know—not in the Dirty Tricks Department. Even if it's crackpot, these days you got to have a look at it."

"He offered sanctuary," said the secretary indignantly. "Can you imagine that!"

"He's been making the rounds, I guess," the general said. "He was over at AEC. Told them some sort of tale about knowing where there were vast uranium deposits. It was the AEC that told me he was heading your way."

"We get them all the time. Usually we can ease them out. This Hudson was

just a little better than the most of them. He got in to see me.''

''He told the colonel something about having a plan that would enable us to establish secret bases anywhere we wished, even in the territory of potential enemies. I know it sounds crazy....''

''Forget it, Les.''

''You're probably right,'' said the general, ''but this idea sends me. Can you imagine the look on their Iron Curtain faces?''

The scared little government clerk, darting conspiratorial glances all about him, brought the portfolio to the FBI.

''I found it in a bar down the street,'' he told the man who took him in tow. ''Been going there for years. And I found this portfolio laying in the booth. I saw the man who must have left it there and I tried to find him later, but I couldn't.''

''How do you know he left it there?''

''I just figured he did. He left the booth just as I came in and it was sort of dark in there and it took a minute to see this thing laying there. You see, I always take the same booth every day and Joe sees me come in and he brings me the usual and—''

''You saw this man leave the booth you usually sit in?''

''That's right.''

''Then you saw the portfolio.''

''Yes, sir.''

''You tried to find the man, thinking it must have been his.''

''That's exactly what I did.''

''But by the time you went to look for him, he had disappeared.''

''That's the way it was.''

''Now tell me—why did you bring it here? Why didn't you turn it in to the management so the man could come back and claim it?''

''Well, sir, it was like this. I had a drink or two and I was wondering all the time what was in that portfolio. So finally I took a peek and—''

''And what you saw decided you to bring it here to us.''

''That's right. I saw—''

''Don't tell me what you saw. Give me your name and address and don't say anything about this. You understand that we're grateful to you for thinking of us, but we'd rather you said nothing.''

''Mum's the word,'' the little clerk assured him, full of vast importance.

The FBI phoned Dr. Ambrose Amberly, Smithsonian expert on paleontology.

''We've got something, Doctor, that we'd like you to have a look at. A lot of

movie film.''

''I'll be most happy to. I'll come down as soon as I get clear. End of the week, perhaps?''

''This is very urgent, Doctor. Damnest thing you ever saw. Big, shaggy elephants and tigers with teeth down to their necks. There's a beaver the size of a bear.''

''Fakes,'' said Amberly, disgusted. ''Clever gadgets. Camera angles.''

''That's what we thought first, but there are no gadgets, no camera angles. This is the real McCoy.''

''I'm on my way,'' the paleontologist said, hanging up.

Snide item in smug, smartaleck gossip column: Saucers are passé at the Pentagon. There's another mystery that's got the high brass very high.

**II**

President Wesley Adams and Secretary of State John Cooper sat glumly under a tree in the capital of Mastodonia and waited for the ambassador extraordinary to return.

''I tell you, Wes,'' said Cooper, who, under various pseudonyms, was also the secretaries of commerce, treasury and war, ''this is a crazy thing we did. What if Chuck can't get back? They might throw him in jail or something might happen to the time unit or the helicopter. We should have gone along.''

''We had to stay,'' Adams said. ''You know what would happen to this camp and our supplies if we weren't around here to guard them.''

''The only thing that's given us any trouble is that old mastodon. If he comes around again, I'm going to take a skillet and bang him in the brisket.''

''That isn't the only reason, either,'' said President Adams, ''and you know it. We can't go deserting this nation now that we've created it. We have to keep possession. Just planting a flag and saying it's ours wouldn't be enough. We might be called upon for proof that we've established residence. Something like the old homestead laws, you know.''

''We'll establish residence sure enough,'' growled Secretary Cooper, ''if something happens to that time unit or the helicopter.''

''You think they'll do it, Johnny?''

''Who do what?''

''The United States. Do you think they'll recognize us?''

''Not if they know who we are.''

''That's what I'm afraid of.''

''Chuck will talk them into it. He can talk the skin right off a cat.''

"Sometimes I think we're going at this wrong. Sure, Chuck's got the long-range view and I suppose it's best. But maybe what we ought to do is grab a good, fast profit and get out of here. We could take in hunting parties at ten thousand a head or maybe we could lease it to a movie company."

"We can do all that and do it legally and with full protection," Cooper told him, "if we can get ourselves recognized as a sovereign nation. If we negotiate a mutual defense pact, no one would dare get hostile because we could squawk to Uncle Sam."

"All you say is true," Adams agreed, "but there are going to be questions. It isn't just a matter of walking into Washington and getting recognition. They'll want to know about us, such as our population. What if Chuck has to tell them it's a total of three persons?"

Cooper shook his head. "He wouldn't answer that way, Wes. He'd duck the question or give them some diplomatic double-talk. After all, how can we be sure there are only three of us? We took over the whole continent, remember."

"You know well enough, Johnny, there are no other humans back here in North America. The farthest back any scientist will place the migrations from Asia is 30,000 years. They haven't got here yet."

"Maybe we should have done it differently," mused Cooper. "Maybe we should have included the whole world in our proclamation, not just the continent. That way, we could claim quite a population."

"It wouldn't have held water. Even as it is, we went a little further than precedent allows. The old explorers usually laid claim to certain watersheds. They'd find a river and lay claim to all the territory drained by the river. They didn't go grabbing off whole continents."

"That's because they were never sure of exactly what they had," said Cooper. "We are. We have what you might call the advantage of hindsight."

He leaned back against the tree and stared across the land. It was a pretty place, he thought—the rolling ridges covered by vast grazing areas and small groves, the forest-covered, ten-mile river valley. And everywhere one looked, the grazing herds of mastodon, giant bison and wild horses, with the less gregarious fauna scattered hit and miss.

Old Buster, the troublesome mastodon, a lone bull which had been probably run out of a herd by a younger rival, stood at the edge of a grove a quarter-mile away. He had his head down and was curling and uncurling his trunk in an aimless sort of way while he teetered slowly in a lazy-crazy fashion by lifting first one foot and then another.

The old cuss was lonely, Cooper told himself. That was why he hung around like a homeless dog—except that he was too big and awkward to have much pet-appeal and, more than likely, his temper was unstable.

The afternoon sun was pleasantly warm and the air, it seemed to Cooper, was the freshest he had ever smelled. It was, altogether, a very pleasant place, an Indian-summer sort of land, ideal for a Sunday picnic or a camping trip.

The breeze was just enough to float out from its flagstaff before the tent the national banner of Mastodonia—a red rampant mastodon upon a field of green.

"You know, Johnny," said Adams, "there's one thing that worries me a lot. If we're going to base our claim on precedent, we may be way off base. The old explorers always claimed their discoveries for their nations or their king, never for themselves."

"The principle was entirely different," Cooper told him. "Nobody ever did anything for himself in those days. Everyone was always under someone else's protection. The explorers either were financed by their governments or were sponsored by them or operated under a royal charter or a patent. With us, it's different. Ours is a private enterprise. You dreamed up the time unit and built it. The three of us chipped in to buy the helicopter. We've paid all of our expenses out of our own pockets. We never got a dime from anyone. What we found is ours."

"I hope you're right," said Adams uneasily.

Old Buster had moved out from the grove and was shuffling warily toward the camp. Adams picked up the rifle that lay across his knees.

"Wait," said Cooper sharply. "Maybe he's just bluffing. It would be a shame to plaster him; he's such a nice old guy."

Adams half raised the rifle.

"I'll give him three steps more," he announced. "I've had enough of him."

Suddenly a roar burst out of the air just above their heads. The two leaped to their feet.

"It's Chuck!" Cooper yelled. "He's back!"

The helicopter made a half-turn of the camp and came rapidly to Earth.

Trumpeting with terror, Old Buster was a dwindling dot far down the grassy ridge.

### III

They built the nightly fires circling the camp to keep out the animals.

"It'll be the death of me yet," said Adams wearily, "cutting all this wood."

"We have to get to work on that stockade," Cooper said. "We've fooled around too long. Some night, fire or no fire, a herd of mastodon will come busting in here and if they ever hit the helicopter, we'll be dead ducks. It wouldn't take more than just five seconds to turn us into Robinson Crusoes of the Pleistocene."

"Well, now that this recognition thing has petered out on us," said Adams, "maybe we can get down to business."

"Trouble is," Cooper answered, "we spent about the last of our money on the chain saw to cut this wood and on Chuck's trip to Washington. To build a stockade, we need a tractor. We'd kill ourselves if we tried to rassle that many logs bare-handed."

"Maybe we could catch some of those horses running around out there."

"Have you ever broken a horse?"

"No, that's one thing I never tried."

"Me, either. How about you, Chuck?"

"Not me," said the ex-ambassador extraordinary bluntly.

Cooper squatted down beside the coals of the cooking fire and twirled the spit. Upon the spit were three grouse and half a dozen quail. The huge coffee pot was sending out a nose-tingling aroma. Biscuits were baking in the reflector.

"We've been here six weeks," he said, "and we're still living in a tent and cooking on an open fire. We better get busy and get something done."

"The stockade first," said Adams, "and that means a tractor."

"We could use the helicopter."

"Do you want to take the chance? That's our getaway. Once something happens to it...."

"I guess not," Cooper admitted, gulping.

"We could use some of that Point Four aid right now," commented Adams.

"They threw me out," said Hudson. "Everywhere I went, sooner or later they got around to throwing me out. They were real organized about it."

"Well, we tried," Adams said.

"And to top it off," added Hudson, "I had to go and lose all that film and now we'll have to waste our time taking more of it. Personally, I don't ever want to let another saber-tooth get that close to me while I hold the camera."

"You didn't have a thing to worry about," Adams objected. "Johnny was right there behind you with the gun."

"Yeah, with the muzzle about a foot from my head when he let go."

"I stopped him, didn't I?" demanded Cooper.

"With his head right in my lap."

"Maybe we won't have to take any more pictures," Adams suggested.

"We'll have to," Cooper said. "There are sportsmen up ahead who'd fork over ten thousand bucks easy for two weeks of hunting here. But before we could sell them on it, we'd have to show them movies. That scene with the saber-tooth would cinch it."

"If it didn't scare them off," Hudson pointed out. "The last few feet showed nothing but the inside of his throat."

Ex-ambassador Hudson looked unhappy. "I don't like the whole setup. As soon as we bring someone in, the news is sure to leak. And once the word gets out, there'll be guys lying in ambush for us—maybe even nations—scheming to steal the know-how, legally or violently. That's what scares me the most about those films I lost. Someone will find them and they may guess what it's all about, but I'm hoping they either won't believe it or can't manage to trace us."

"We could swear the hunting parties to secrecy," said Cooper.

"How could a sportsman keep still about the mounted head of a saber-tooth or a record piece of ivory?" And the same thing would apply to anyone we approached. Some university could raise dough to send a team of scientists back here and a movie company would cough up plenty to use this place as a location for a caveman epic. But it wouldn't be worth a thing to either of them if they couldn't tell about it.

"Now if we could have gotten recognition as a nation, we'd have been all set. We could make our own laws and regulations and be able to enforce them. We could bring in settlers and establish trade. We could exploit our natural resources. It would all be legal and aboveboard. We could tell who we were and where we were and what we had to offer."

"We aren't licked yet," said Adams. "There's a lot that we can do. Those river hills are covered with ginseng. We can each dig a dozen pounds a day. There's good money in the root."

"Ginseng root," Cooper said, "is peanuts. We need big money."

"Or we could trap," offered Adams. "The place is alive with beaver."

"Have you taken a good look at those beaver? They're about the size of a St. Bernard."

"All the better. Think how much just one pelt would bring."

"No dealer would believe that it was beaver. He'd think you were trying to pull a fast one on him. And there are only a few states that allow beaver to be trapped. To sell the pelts—even if you could—you'd have to take out licenses in each of those states."

"Those mastodon carry a lot of ivory," said Cooper. "And if we wanted to go north, we'd find mammoths that would carry even more...."

"And get socked into the jug for ivory smuggling?"

They sat, all three of them, staring at the fire, not finding anything to say.

The moaning complaint of a giant hunting cat came from somewhere up the river.

## IV

Hudson lay in his sleeping bag, staring at the sky. It bothered him a lot.

There was not one familiar constellation, not one star that he could name with any certainty. This juggling of the stars, he thought, emphasized more than anything else in this ancient land the vast gulf of years which lay between him and the Earth where he had been—or would be—born.

A hundred and fifty thousand years, Adams had said, give or take ten thousand. There just was no way to know. Later on, there might be. A measurement of the stars and a comparison with their positions in the twentieth century might be one way of doing it. But at the moment, any figure could be no more than a guess.

The time machine was not something that could be tested for calibration or performance. As a matter of fact, there was no way to test it. They had not been certain, he remembered, the first time they had used it, that it would really work. There had been no way to find out. When it worked, you knew it worked. And if it hadn't worked, there would have been no way of knowing beforehand that it wouldn't.

Adams had been sure, of course, but that had been because he had absolute reliance in the half-mathematical, half-philosophic concepts he had worked out—concepts that neither Hudson nor Cooper could come close to understanding.

That had always been the way it had been, even when they were kids, with Wes dreaming up the deals that he and Johnny carried out. Back in those days, too, they had used time travel in their play. Out in Johnny's back yard, they had rigged up a time machine out of a wonderful collection of salvaged junk—a wooden crate, an empty five-gallon paint pail, a battered coffee maker, a bunch of discarded copper tubing, a busted steering wheel and other odds and ends. In it, they had "traveled" back to Indian-before-the-white-man land and mammoth-land and dinosaur-land and the slaughter, he remembered, had been wonderfully appalling.

But, in reality, it had been much different. There was much more to it than gunning down the weird fauna that one found.

And they should have known there would be, for they had talked about it often.

He thought of the bull session back in university and the little, usually silent kid who sat quietly in the corner, a law-school student whose last name had been Pritchard.

And after sitting silently for some time, this Pritchard kid had spoken up: "If you guys ever do travel in time, you'll run up against more than you bargain for. I don't mean the climate or the terrain or the fauna, but the economics and the politics."

They all jeered at him, Hudson remembered, and then had gone on with their talk. And after a short while, the talk had turned to women, as it always did.

He wondered where that quiet man might be. Some day, Hudson told himself, I'll have to look him up and tell him he was right.

We did it wrong, he thought. There were so many other ways we might have done it, but we'd been so sure and greedy—greedy for the triumph and the glory—and now there was no easy way to collect.

On the verge of success, they could have sought out help, gone to some large industrial concern or an educational foundation or even to the government. Like historic explorers, they could have obtained subsidization and sponsorship. Then they would have had protection, funds to do a proper job and they need not have operated on their present shoestring—one beaten-up helicopter and one time unit. They could have had several and at least one standing by in the twentieth century as a rescue unit, should that be necessary.

But that would have meant a bargain, perhaps a very hard one, and sharing with someone who had contributed nothing but the money. And there was more than money in a thing like this—there were twenty years of dreams and a great idea and the dedication to that great idea—years of work and years of disappointment and an almost fanatical refusal to give up.

Even so, thought Hudson, they had figured well enough. There had been many chances to make blunders and they'd made relatively few. All they lacked, in the last analysis, was backing.

Take the helicopter, for example. It was the one satisfactory vehicle for time traveling. You had to get up in the air to clear whatever upheavals and subsidences there had been through geologic ages. The helicopter took you up and kept you clear and gave you a chance to pick a proper landing place. Travel without it and, granting you were lucky with land surfaces, you still might materialize in the heart of some great tree or end up in a swamp or the middle of a herd of startled, savage beasts. A plane would have done as well, but back in this world, you couldn't land a plane—or you couldn't be certain that you could. A helicopter, though, could land almost anywhere.

In the time-distance they had traveled, they almost certainly had been lucky, although one could not be entirely sure just how great a part of it was luck. Wes had felt that he had not been working as blindly as it sometimes might appear. He had calibrated the unit for jumps of 50,000 years. Finer calibration, he had said realistically, would have to wait for more developmental work.

Using the 50,000-year calibrations, they had figured it out. One jump (conceding that the calibration was correct) would have landed them at the end of the Wisconsin glacial period; two jumps, at its beginning. The third would set them down toward the end of the Sangamon Interglacial and apparently it had—give or take ten thousand years or so.

They had arrived at a time when the climate did not seem to vary greatly,

either hot or cold. The flora was modern enough to give them a homelike feeling. The fauna, modern and Pleistocenic, overlapped. And the surface features were little altered from the twentieth century. The rivers ran along familiar paths, the hills and bluffs looked much the same. In this corner of the Earth, at least, 150,000 years had not changed things greatly.

Boyhood dreams, Hudson thought, were wondrous. It was not often that three men who had daydreamed in their youth could follow it out to its end. But they had and here they were.

Johnny was on watch, and it was Hudson's turn next, and he'd better get to sleep. He closed his eyes, then opened them again for another look at the unfamiliar stars. The east, he saw, was flushed with silver light. Soon the Moon would rise, which was good. A man could keep a better watch when the Moon was up.

He woke suddenly, snatched upright and into full awareness by the marrow-chilling clamor that slashed across the night. The very air seemed curdled by the savage racket and, for a moment, he sat numbed by it. Then, slowly, it seemed—his brain took the noise and separated it into two distinct but intermingled categories, the deadly screaming of a cat and the maddened trumpeting of a mastodon.

The Moon was up and the countryside was flooded by its light. Cooper, he saw, was out beyond the watchfires, standing there and watching, with his rifle ready. Adams was scrambling out of his sleeping bag, swearing softly to himself. The cooking fire had burned down to a bed of mottled coals, but the watchfires still were burning and the helicopter, parked within their circle, picked up the glint of flames.

"It's Buster," Adams told him angrily. "I'd know that bellowing of his anywhere. He's done nothing but parade up and down and bellow ever since we got here. And now he seems to have gone out and found himself a saber-tooth."

Hudson zipped down his sleeping bag, grabbed up his rifle and jumped to his feet, following Adams in a silent rush to where Cooper stood.

Cooper motioned at them. "Don't break it up. You'll never see the like of it again."

Adams brought his rifle up.

Cooper knocked the barrel down.

"You fool!" he shouted. "You want them turning on us?"

Two hundred yards away stood the mastodon and, on his back, the screeching saber-tooth. The great beast reared into the air and came down with a jolt, bucking to unseat the cat, flailing the air with his massive trunk. And as he bucked, the cat struck and struck again with his gleaming teeth, aiming for the spine.

Then the mastodon crashed head downward, as if to turn a somersault, rolled

and was on his feet again, closer to them now than he had been before. The huge cat had sprung off.

For a moment, the two stood facing one another. Then the tiger charged, a flowing streak of motion in the moonlight. Buster wheeled away and the cat, leaping, hit his shoulder, clawed wildly and slid off. The mastodon whipped to the attack, tusks slashing, huge feet stamping. The cat, caught a glancing blow by one of the tusks, screamed and leaped up, to land in spread-eagle fashion upon Buster's head.

Maddened with pain and fright, blinded by the tiger's raking claws, the old mastodon ran—straight toward the camp. And as he ran, he grasped the cat in his trunk and tore him from his hold, lifted him high and threw him.

"Look out!" yelled Cooper and brought his rifle up and fired.

For an instant, Hudson saw it all as if it were a single scene, motionless, one frame snatched from a fantastic movie epic—the charging mastodon, with the tiger lifted and the sound track one great blast of bloodthirsty bedlam.

Then the scene dissolved in a blur of motion. He felt his rifle thud against his shoulder, knowing he had fired, but not hearing the explosion. And the mastodon was almost on top of him, bearing down like some mighty and remorseless engine of blind destruction.

He flung himself to one side and the giant brushed past him. Out of the tail of his eye, he saw the thrown saber-tooth crash to Earth within the circle of the watchfires.

He brought his rifle up again and caught the area behind Buster's ear within his sights. He pressed the trigger. The mastodon staggered, then regained his stride and went rushing on. He hit one of the watchfires dead center and went through it, scattering coals and burning brands.

Then there was a thud and the screeching clang of metal.

"Oh, no!" shouted Hudson.

Rushing forward, they stopped inside the circle of the fires.

The helicopter lay tilted at a crazy angle. One of its rotor blades was crumpled. Half across it, as if he might have fallen as he tried to bull his mad way over it, lay the mastodon.

Something crawled across the ground toward them, its spitting, snarling mouth gaping in the firelight, its back broken, hind legs trailing.

Calmly, without a word, Adams put a bullet into the head of the saber-tooth.

## V

General Leslie Bowers rose from his chair and paced up and down the room. He stopped to bang the conference table with a knotted fist.

"You can't do it," he bawled at them. "You can't kill the project. I know there's something to it. We can't give it up!"

"But it's been ten years, General," said the secretary of the army. "If they were coming back, they'd be here by now."

The general stopped his pacing, stiffened. Who did that little civilian squirt think he was, talking to the military in that tone of voice!

"We know how you feel about it, General," said the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. "I think we all recognize how deeply you're involved. You've blamed yourself all these years and there is no need of it. After all, there may be nothing to it."

"Sir," said the general, "I know there's something to it. I thought so at the time, even when no one else did. And what we've turned up since serves to bear me out. Let's take a look at these three men of ours. We knew almost nothing of them at the time, but we know them now. I've traced out their lives from the time that they were born until they disappeared—and I might add that, on the chance it might be all a hoax, we've searched for them for years and we've found no trace at all.

"I've talked with those who knew them and I've studied their scholastic and military records. I've arrived at the conclusion that if any three men could do it, they were the ones who could. Adams was the brains and the other two were the ones who carried out the things that he dreamed up. Cooper was a bulldog sort of man who could keep them going and it would be Hudson who would figure out the angles.

"And they knew the angles, gentlemen. They had it all doped out.

"What Hudson tried here in Washington is substantial proof of that. But even back in school, they were thinking of those angles. I talked some years ago to a lawyer in New York, name of Pritchard. He told me that even back in university, they talked of the economic and political problems that they might face if they ever cracked what they were working at.

"Wesley Adams was one of our brightest young scientific men. His record at the university and his war work bears that out. After the war, there were at least a dozen jobs he could have had. But he wasn't interested. And I'll tell you why he wasn't. He had something bigger—something he wanted to work on. So he and these two others went off by themselves—"

"You think he was working on a temporal—" the army secretary cut in.

"He was working on a time machine," roared the general. "I don't know about this 'temporal' business. Just plain 'time machine' is good enough for me."

"Let's calm down, General," said the JCS chairman, "After all, there's no need to shout."

The general nodded. "I'm sorry, sir. I get all worked up about this. I've spent the last ten years with it. As you say, I'm trying to make up for what I failed to do ten years ago. I should have talked to Hudson. I was busy, sure, but not that busy. It's an official state of mind that we're too busy to see anyone and I plead guilty on that score. And now that you're talking about closing the project—"

"It's costing us money," said the army secretary.

"And we have no direct evidence," pointed out the JCS chairman.

"I don't know what you want," snapped the general. "If there was any man alive who could crack time, that man was Wesley Adams. We found where he worked. We found the workshop and we talked to neighbors who said there was something funny going on and—"

"But ten years, General!" the army secretary protested.

"Hudson came here, bringing us the greatest discovery in all history, and we kicked him out. After that, do you expect them to come crawling back to us?"

"You think they went to someone else?"

"They wouldn't do that. They know what the thing they have found would mean. They wouldn't sell us out."

"Hudson came with a preposterous proposition," said the man from the state department.

"They had to protect themselves!" yelled the general. "If you had discovered a virgin planet with its natural resources intact, what would you do about it? Come trotting down here and hand it over to a government that's too 'busy' to recognize—"

"General!"

"Yes, sir," apologized the general tiredly. "I wish you gentlemen could see my view of it, how it all fits together. First there were the films and we have the word of a dozen competent paleontologists that it's impossible to fake anything as perfect as those films. But even granting that they could be, there are certain differences that no one would ever think of faking, because no one ever knew. Who, as an example, would put lynx tassels on the ears of a saber-tooth? Who would know that young mastodon were black?

"And the location. I wonder if you've forgotten that we tracked down the location of Adams' workshop from those films alone. They gave us clues so positive that we didn't even hesitate—we drove straight to the old deserted farm where Adams and his friends had worked. Don't you see how it all fits together?"

"I presume," the man from the state department said nastily, "that you even have an explanation as to why they chose that particular location."

"You thought you had me there," said the general, "but I have an answer. A good one. The southwestern corner of Wisconsin is a geologic curiosity. It was

missed by all the glaciations. Why, we do not know. Whatever the reason, the glaciers came down on both sides of it and far to the south of it and left it standing there, a little island in a sea of ice.

"And another thing: Except for a time in the Triassic, that same area of Wisconsin has always been dry land. That and a few other spots are the only areas in North America which have not, time and time again, been covered by water. I don't think it necessary to point out the comfort it would be to an experimental traveler in time to be certain that, in almost any era he might hit, he'd have dry land beneath him."

The economics expert spoke up: "We've given this matter a lot of study and, while we do not feel ourselves competent to rule upon the possibility or impossibility of time travel, there are some observations I should like, at some time, to make."

"Go ahead right now," said the JCS chairman.

"We see one objection to the entire matter. One of the reasons, naturally, that we had some interest in it is that, if true, it would give us an entire new planet to exploit, perhaps more wisely than we've done in the past. But the thought occurs that any planet has only a certain grand total of natural resources. If we go into the past and exploit them, what effect will that have upon what is left of those resources for use in the present? Wouldn't we, in doing this, be robbing ourselves of our own heritage?"

"That contention," said the AEC chairman, "wouldn't hold true in every case. Quite the reverse, in fact. We know that there was, in some geologic ages in the past, a great deal more uranium than we have today. Go back far enough and you'd catch that uranium before it turned into lead. In southwestern Wisconsin, there is a lot of lead. Hudson told us he knew the location of vast uranium deposits and we thought he was a crackpot talking through his hat. If we'd known—let's be fair about this—if we had known and believed him about going back in time, we'd have snapped him up at once and all this would not have happened."

"It wouldn't hold true with forests, either," said the chairman of the JCS. "Or with pastures or with crops."

The economics expert was slightly flushed. "There is another thing," he said. "If we go back in time and colonize the land we find there, what would happen when that—well, let's call it retroactive—when that retroactive civilization reaches the beginning of our historic period? What will result from that cultural collision? Will our history change? Is what has happened false? Is all—"

"That's all poppycock!" the general shouted. "That and this other talk about using up resources. Whatever we did in the past—or are about to do—has been done already. I've lain awake nights, mister, thinking about all these things and there is no answer, believe me, except the one I give you. The question which

faces us here is an immediate one. Do we give all this up or do we keep on watching that Wisconsin farm, waiting for them to come back? Do we keep on trying to find, independently, the process or formula or method that Adams found for traveling in time?''

''We've had no luck in our research so far, General,'' said the quiet physicist who sat at the table's end. ''If you were not so sure and if the evidence were not so convincing that it had been done by Adams, I'd say flatly that it is impossible. We have no approach which holds any hope at all. What we've done so far, you might best describe as flounder. But if Adams turned the trick, it must be possible. There may be, as a matter of fact, more ways than one. We'd like to keep on trying.''

''Not one word of blame has been put on you for your failure,'' the chairman told the physicist. ''That you could do it seems to be more than can be humanly expected. If Adams did it—if he did, I say—it must have been simply that he blundered on an avenue of research no other man has thought of.''

''You will recall,'' said the general, ''that the research program, even from the first, was thought of strictly as a gamble. Our one hope was, and must remain, that they will return.''

''It would have been so much simpler all around,'' the state department man said, ''if Adams had patented his method.''

The general raged at him. ''And had it published, all neat and orderly, in the patent office records so that anyone who wanted it could look it up and have it?''

''We can be most sincerely thankful,'' said the chairman, ''that he did not patent it.''

**VI**

The helicopter would never fly again, but the time unit was intact.

Which didn't mean that it would work.

They held a powwow at their camp site. It had been, they decided, simpler to move the camp than to remove the body of Old Buster. So they had shifted at dawn, leaving the old mastodon still sprawled across the helicopter.

In a day or two, they knew, the great bones would be cleanly picked by the carrion birds, the lesser cats, the wolves and foxes and the little skulkers.

Getting the time unit out of the helicopter had been quite a chore, but they finally had managed and now Adams sat with it cradled in his lap.

''The worst of it,'' he told them, ''is that I can't test it. There's no way to. You turn it on and it works or it doesn't work. You can't know till you try.''

''That's something we can't help,'' Cooper replied. ''The problem, seems to me, is how we're going to use it without the whirlybird.''

"We have to figure out some way to get up in the air," said Adams. "We don't want to take the chance of going up into the twentieth century and arriving there about six feet underground."

"Common sense says that we should be higher here than up ahead," Hudson pointed out. "These hills have stood here since Jurassic times. They probably were a good deal higher then and have weathered down. That weathering still should be going on. So we should be higher here than in the twentieth century—not much, perhaps, but higher."

"Did anyone ever notice what the altimeter read?" asked Cooper.

"I don't believe I did," Adams admitted.

"It wouldn't tell you, anyhow," Hudson declared. "It would just give our height then and now—and we were moving, remember—and what about air pockets and relative atmosphere density and all the rest?"

Cooper looked as discouraged as Hudson felt.

"How does this sound?" asked Adams. "We'll build a platform twelve feet high. That certainly should be enough to clear us and yet small enough to stay within the range of the unit's force-field."

"And what if we're two feet higher here?" Hudson pointed out.

"A fall of fourteen feet wouldn't kill a man unless he's plain unlucky."

"It might break some bones."

"So it might break some bones. You want to stay here or take a chance on a broken leg?"

"All right, if you put it that way. A platform, you say. A platform out of what?"

"Timber. There's lot of it. We just go out and cut some logs."

"A twelve-foot log is heavy. And how are we going to get that big a log uphill?"

"We drag it."

"We try to, you mean."

"Maybe we could fix up a cart," said Adams, after thinking a moment.

"Out of what?" Cooper asked.

"Rollers, maybe. We could cut some and roll the logs up here."

"That would work on level ground," Hudson said. "It wouldn't work to roll a log uphill. It would get away from us. Someone might get killed."

"The logs would have to be longer than twelve feet, anyhow," Cooper put in. "You'd have to set them in a hole and that takes away some footage."

"Why not the tripod principle?" Hudson offered. "Fasten three logs at the top and raise them."

"That's a gin-pole, a primitive derrick. It'd still have to be longer than twelve

feet. Fifteen, sixteen, maybe. And how are we going to hoist three sixteen-foot logs? We'd need a block and tackle."

"There's another thing," said Cooper. "Part of those logs might just be beyond the effective range of the force-field. Part of them would have to—have to, mind you—move in time and part couldn't. That would set up a stress...."

"Another thing about it," added Hudson, "is that we'd travel with the logs. I don't want to come out in another time with a bunch of logs flying all around me."

"Cheer up," Adams told them. "Maybe the unit won't work, anyhow."

**VII**

The general sat alone in his office and held his head between his hands. The fools, he thought, the goddam knuckle-headed fools! Why couldn't they see it as clearly as he did?

For fifteen years now, as head of Project Mastodon, he had lived with it night and day and he could see all the possibilities as clearly as if they had been actual fact. Not military possibilities alone, although as a military man, he naturally would think of those first.

The hidden bases, for example, located within the very strongholds of potential enemies—within, yet centuries removed in time. Many centuries removed and only seconds distant.

He could see it all: The materialization of the fleets; the swift, devastating blow, then the instantaneous retreat into the fastnesses of the past. Terrific destruction, but not a ship lost nor a man.

Except that if you had the bases, you need never strike the blow. If you had the bases and let the enemy know you had them, there would never be the provocation.

And on the home front, you'd have air-raid shelters that would be effective. You'd evacuate your population not in space, but time. You'd have the sure and absolute defense against any kind of bombing—fission, fusion, bacteriological or whatever else the labs had in stock.

And if the worst should come—which it never would with a setup like that—you'd have a place to which the entire nation could retreat, leaving to the enemy the empty, blasted cities and the lethally dusted countryside.

Sanctuary—that had been what Hudson had offered the then-secretary of state fifteen years ago—and the idiot had frozen up with the insult of it and had Hudson thrown out.

And if war did not come, think of the living space and the vast new opportunities—not the least of which would be the opportunity to achieve peaceful living in a virgin world, where the old hatreds would slough off and new concepts have

a chance to grow.

He wondered where they were, those three who had gone back into time. Dead, perhaps. Run down by a mastodon. Or stalked by tigers. Or maybe done in by warlike tribesmen. No, he kept forgetting there weren't any in that era. Or trapped in time, unable to get back, condemned to exile in an alien time. Or maybe, he thought, just plain disgusted. And he couldn't blame them if they were.

Or maybe—let's be fantastic about this—sneaking in colonists from some place other than the watched Wisconsin farm, building up in actuality the nation they had claimed to be.

They had to get back to the present soon or Project Mastodon would be killed entirely. Already the research program had been halted and if something didn't happen quickly, the watch that was kept on the Wisconsin farm would be called off.

"And if they do that," said the general, "I know just what I'll do."

He got up and strode around the room.

"By God," he said, "I'll show 'em!"

**VIII**

It had taken ten full days of back-breaking work to build the pyramid. They'd hauled the rocks from the creek bed half a mile away and had piled them, stone by rolling stone, to the height of a full twelve feet. It took a lot of rocks and a lot of patience, for as the pyramid went up, the base naturally kept broadening out.

But now all was finally ready.

Hudson sat before the burned-out campfire and held his blistered hands before him.

It should work, he thought, better than the logs—and less dangerous.

Grab a handful of sand. Some trickled back between your fingers, but most stayed in your grasp. That was the principle of the pyramid of stones. When—and if—the time machine should work, most of the rocks would go along.

Those that didn't go would simply trickle out and do no harm. There'd be no stress or strain to upset the working of the force-field.

And if the time unit didn't work?

Or if it did?

This was the end of the dream, thought Hudson, no matter how you looked at it.

For even if they did get back to the twentieth century, there would be no money and with the film lost and no other taken to replace it, they'd have no proof they had traveled back beyond the dawn of history—back almost to the dawn of Man.

Although how far you traveled would have no significance. An hour or a million years would be all the same; if you could span the hour, you could span the million years. And if you could go back the million years, it was within your power to go back to the first tick of eternity, the first stir of time across the face of emptiness and nothingness—back to that initial instant when nothing as yet had happened or been planned or thought, when all the vastness of the Universe was a new slate waiting the first chalk stroke of destiny.

Another helicopter would cost thirty thousand dollars—and they didn't even have the money to buy the tractor that they needed to build the stockade.

There was no way to borrow. You couldn't walk into a bank and say you wanted thirty thousand to take a trip back to the Old Stone Age.

You still could go to some industry or some university or the government and if you could persuade them you had something on the ball—why, then, they might put up the cash after cutting themselves in on just about all of the profits. And, naturally, they'd run the show because it was their money and all you had done was the sweating and the bleeding.

"There's one thing that still bothers me," said Cooper, breaking the silence. "We spent a lot of time picking our spot so we'd miss the barn and house and all the other buildings...."

"Don't tell me the windmill!" Hudson cried.

"No. I'm pretty sure we're clear of that. But the way I figure, we're right astraddle that barbed-wire fence at the south end of the orchard."

"If you want, we could move the pyramid over twenty feet or so."

Cooper groaned. "I'll take my chances with the fence." Adams got to his feet, the time unit tucked underneath his arm. "Come on, you guys. It's time to go."

They climbed the pyramid gingerly and stood unsteadily at its top.

Adams shifted the unit around, clasped it to his chest.

"Stand around close," he said, "and bend your knees a little. It may be quite a drop."

"Go ahead," said Cooper. "Press the button."

Adams pressed the button.

Nothing happened.

The unit didn't work.

## IX

The chief of Central Intelligence was white-lipped when he finished talking.

"You're sure of your information?" asked the President.

"Mr. President," said the CIA chief, "I've never been more sure of anything in my entire life."

The President looked at the other two who were in the room, a question in his eyes.

The JCS chairman said, "It checks, sir, with everything we know."

"But it's incredible!" the President said.

"They're afraid," said the CIA chief. "They lie awake nights. They've become convinced that we're on the verge of traveling in time. They've tried and failed, but they think we're near success. To their way of thinking, they've got to hit us now or never, because once we actually get time travel, they know their number's up."

"But we dropped Project Mastodon entirely almost three years ago. It's been all of ten years since we stopped the research. It was twenty-five years ago that Hudson—"

"That makes no difference, sir. They're convinced we dropped the project publicly, but went underground with it. That would be the kind of strategy they could understand."

The President picked up a pencil and doodled on a pad.

"Who was that old general," he asked, "the one who raised so much fuss when we dropped the project? I remember I was in the Senate then. He came around to see me."

"Bowers, sir," said the JCS chairman.

"That's right. What became of him?"

"Retired."

"Well, I guess it doesn't make any difference now." He doodled some more and finally said, "Gentlemen, it looks like this is it. How much time did you say we had?"

"Not more than ninety days, sir. Maybe as little as thirty."

The President looked up at the JCS chairman.

"We're as ready," said the chairman, "as we will ever be. We can handle them—I think. There will, of course, be some—"

"I know," said the President.

"Could we bluff?" asked the secretary of state, speaking quietly. "I know it wouldn't stick, but at least we might buy some time."

"You mean hint that we have time travel?"

The secretary nodded.

"It wouldn't work," said the CIA chief tiredly. "If we really had it, there'd be

no question then. They'd become exceedingly well-mannered, even neighborly, if they were sure we had it."

"But we haven't got it," said the President gloomily.

## X

The two hunters trudged homeward late in the afternoon, with a deer slung from a pole they carried on their shoulders. Their breath hung visibly in the air as they walked along, for the frost had come and any day now, they knew, there would be snow.

"I'm worried about Wes," said Cooper, breathing heavily. "He's taking this too hard. We got to keep an eye on him."

"Let's take a rest," panted Hudson.

They halted and lowered the deer to the ground.

"He blames himself too much," said Cooper. He wiped his sweaty forehead. "There isn't any need to. All of us walked into this with our eyes wide open."

"He's kidding himself and he knows it, but it gives him something to go on. As long as he can keep busy with all his puttering around, he'll be all right."

"He isn't going to repair the time unit, Chuck."

"I know he isn't. And he knows it, too. He hasn't got the tools or the materials. Back in the workshop, he might have a chance, but here he hasn't."

"It's rough on him."

"It's rough on all of us."

"Yes, but we didn't get a brainstorm that marooned two old friends in this tail end of nowhere. And we can't make him swallow it when we say that it's okay, we don't mind at all."

"That's a lot to swallow, Johnny."

"What's going to happen to us, Chuck?"

"We've got ourselves a place to live and there's lots to eat. Save our ammo for the big game—a lot of eating for each bullet—and trap the smaller animals."

"I'm wondering what will happen when the flour and all the other stuff is gone. We don't have too much of it because we always figured we could bring in more."

"We'll live on meat," said Hudson. "We got bison by the million. The plains Indians lived on them alone. And in the spring, we'll find roots and in the summer berries. And in the fall, we'll harvest a half-dozen kinds of nuts."

"Some day our ammo will be gone, no matter how careful we are with it."

"Bows and arrows. Slingshots. Spears."

"There's a lot of beasts here I wouldn't want to stand up to with nothing but

a spear."

"We won't stand up to them. We'll duck when we can and run when we can't duck. Without our guns, we're no lords of creation—not in this place. If we're going to live, we'll have to recognize that fact."

"And if one of us gets sick or breaks a leg or—"

"We'll do the best we can. Nobody lives forever."

But they were talking around the thing that really bothered them, Hudson told himself—each of them afraid to speak the thought aloud.

They'd live, all right, so far as food, shelter and clothing were concerned. And they'd live most of the time in plenty, for this was a fat and open-handed land and a man could make an easy living.

But the big problem—the one they were afraid to talk about—was their emptiness of purpose. To live, they had to find some meaning in a world without society.

A man cast away on a desert isle could always live for hope, but here there was no hope. A Robinson Crusoe was separated from his fellow-humans by, at the most, a few thousand miles. Here they were separated by a hundred and fifty thousand years.

Wes Adams was the lucky one so far. Even playing his thousand-to-one shot, he still held tightly to a purpose, feeble as it might be—the hope that he could repair the time machine.

We don't need to watch him now, thought Hudson. The time we'll have to watch is when he is forced to admit he can't fix the machine.

And both Hudson and Cooper had been kept sane enough, for there had been the cabin to be built and the winter's supply of wood to cut and the hunting to be done.

But then there would come a time when all the chores were finished and there was nothing left to do.

"You ready to go?" asked Cooper.

"Sure. All rested now," said Hudson.

They hoisted the pole to their shoulders and started off again.

Hudson had lain awake nights thinking of it and all the thoughts had been dead ends.

One could write a natural history of the Pleistocene, complete with photographs and sketches, and it would be a pointless thing to do, because no future scientist would ever have a chance to read it.

Or they might labor to build a memorial, a vast pyramid, perhaps, which would carry a message forward across fifteen hundred centuries, snatching with bare hands at a semblance of immortality. But if they did, they would be working

against the sure and certain knowledge that it all would come to naught, for they knew in advance that no such pyramid existed in historic time.

Or they might set out to seek contemporary Man, hiking across four thousand miles of wilderness to Bering Strait and over into Asia. And having found contemporary Man cowering in his caves, they might be able to help him immeasurably along the road to his great inheritance. Except that they'd never make it and even if they did, contemporary Man undoubtedly would find some way to do them in and might eat them in the bargain.

They came out of the woods and there was the cabin, just a hundred yards away. It crouched against the hillside above the spring, with the sweep of grassland billowing beyond it to the slate-gray skyline. A trickle of smoke came up from the chimney and they saw the door was open.

"Wes oughtn't to leave it open that way," said Cooper. "No telling when a bear might decide to come visiting."

"Hey, Wes!" yelled Hudson.

But there was no sign of him.

Inside the cabin, a white sheet of paper lay on the table top. Hudson snatched it up and read it, with Cooper at his shoulder.

Dear guys—I don't want to get your hopes up again and have you disappointed. But I think I may have found the trouble. I'm going to try it out. If it doesn't work, I'll come back and burn this note and never say a word. But if you find the note, you'll know it worked and I'll be back to get you. Wes.

Hudson crumpled the note in his hand. "The crazy fool!"

"He's gone off his rocker," Cooper said. "He just thought...."

The same thought struck them both and they bolted for the door. At the corner of the cabin, they skidded to a halt and stood there, staring at the ridge above them.

The pyramid of rocks they'd built two months ago was gone!

**XI**

The crash brought Gen. Leslie Bowers (ret.) up out of bed—about two feet out of bed—old muscles tense, white mustache bristling.

Even at his age, the general was a man of action. He flipped the covers back, swung his feet out to the floor and grabbed the shotgun leaning against the wall.

Muttering, he blundered out of the bedroom, marched across the dining room and charged into the kitchen. There, beside the door, he snapped on the switch that turned on the floodlights. He practically took the door off its hinges getting to the stoop and he stood there, bare feet gripping the planks, nightshirt

billowing in the wind, the shotgun poised and ready.

"What's going on out there?" he bellowed.

There was a tremendous pile of rocks resting where he'd parked his car. One crumpled fender and a drunken headlight peeped out of the rubble.

A man was clambering carefully down the jumbled stones, making a detour to dodge the battered fender.

The general pulled back the hammer of the gun and fought to control himself.

The man reached the bottom of the pile and turned around to face him. The general saw that he was hugging something tightly to his chest.

"Mister," the general told him, "your explanation better be a good one. That was a brand-new car. And this was the first time I was set for a night of sleep since my tooth quit aching."

The man just stood and looked at him.

"Who in thunder are you?" roared the general.

The man walked slowly forward. He stopped at the bottom of the stoop.

"My name is Wesley Adams," he said. "I'm—"

"Wesley Adams!" howled the general. "My God, man, where have you been all these years?"

"Well, I don't imagine you'll believe me, but the fact is...."

"We've been waiting for you. For twenty-five long years! Or, rather, I've been waiting for you. Those other idiots gave up. I've waited right here for you, Adams, for the last three years, ever since they called off the guard."

Adams gulped. "I'm sorry about the car. You see, it was this way...."

The general, he saw, was beaming at him fondly.

"I had faith in you," the general said.

He waved the shotgun by way of invitation. "Come on in. I have a call to make."

Adams stumbled up the stairs.

"Move!" the general ordered, shivering. "On the double! You want me to catch my death of cold out here?"

Inside, he fumbled for the lights and turned them on. He laid the shotgun across the kitchen table and picked up the telephone.

"Give me the White House at Washington," he said. "Yes, I said the White House.... The President? Naturally he's the one I want to talk to.... Yes, it's all right. He won't mind my calling him."

"Sir," said Adams tentatively.

The general looked up. "What is it, Adams? Go ahead and say it."

"Did you say twenty-five years?"

"That's what I said. What were you doing all that time?"

Adams grasped the table and hung on. "But it wasn't...."

"Yes," said the general to the operator. "Yes, I'll wait."

He held his hand over the receiver and looked inquiringly at Adams. "I imagine you'll want the same terms as before."

"Terms?"

"Sure. Recognition. Point Four Aid. Defense pact."

"I suppose so," Adams said.

"You got these saps across the barrel," the general told him happily. "You can get anything you want. You rate it, too, after what you've done and the bonehead treatment you got—but especially for not selling out."

**XII**

The night editor read the bulletin just off the teletype.

"Well, what do you know!" he said. "We just recognized Mastodonia."

He looked at the copy chief.

"Where the hell is Mastodonia?" he asked.

The copy chief shrugged. "Don't ask me. You're the brains in this joint."

"Well, let's get a map for the next edition," said the night editor.

**XIII**

Tabby, the saber-tooth, dabbed playfully at Cooper with his mighty paw.

Cooper kicked him in the ribs—an equally playful gesture.

Tabby snarled at him.

"Show your teeth at me, will you!" said Cooper. "Raised you from a kitten and that's the gratitude you show. Do it just once more and I'll belt you in the chops."

Tabby lay down blissfully and began to wash his face.

"Some day," warned Hudson, "that cat will miss a meal and that's the day you're it."

"Gentle as a dove," Cooper assured him. "Wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Well, one thing about it, nothing dares to bother us with that monstrosity around."

"Best watchdog there ever was. Got to have something to guard all this stuff we've got. When Wes gets back, we'll be millionaires. All those furs and ginseng and the ivory."

"If he gets back."

"He'll be back. Quit your worrying."

"But it's been five years," Hudson protested.

"He'll be back. Something happened, that's all. He's probably working on it right now. Could be that he messed up the time setting when he repaired the unit or it might have been knocked out of kilter when Buster hit the helicopter. That would take a while to fix. I don't worry that he won't come back. What I can't figure out is why did he go and leave us?"

"I've told you," Hudson said. "He was afraid it wouldn't work."

"There wasn't any need to be scared of that. We never would have laughed at him."

"No. Of course we wouldn't."

"Then what was he scared of?" Cooper asked.

"If the unit failed and we knew it failed, Wes was afraid we'd try to make him see how hopeless and insane it was. And he knew we'd probably convince him and then all his hope would be gone. And he wanted to hang onto that, Johnny. He wanted to hang onto his hope even when there wasn't any left."

"That doesn't matter now," said Cooper. "What counts is that he'll come back. I can feel it in my bones."

And here's another case, thought Hudson, of hope begging to be allowed to go on living.

God, he thought, I wish I could be that blind!

"Wes is working on it right now," said Cooper confidently.

**XIV**

He was. Not he alone, but a thousand others, working desperately, knowing that the time was short, working not alone for two men trapped in time, but for the peace they all had dreamed about—that the whole world had yearned for through the ages.

For to be of any use, it was imperative that they could zero in the time machines they meant to build as an artilleryman would zero in a battery of guns, that each time machine would take its occupants to the same instant of the past, that their operation would extend over the same period of time, to the exact second.

It was a problem of control and calibration—starting with a prototype that was calibrated, as its finest adjustment, for jumps of 50,000 years.

Project Mastodon was finally under way.

## REBEL RAIDER

It was almost midnight, on January 2, 1863, and the impromptu party at the Ratcliffe home was breaking up. The guest of honor, General J. E. B. Stuart, felt that he was overstaying his welcome—not at the Ratcliffe home, where everybody was soundly Confederate, but in Fairfax County, then occupied by the Union Army.

About a week before, he had come raiding up from Culpepper with a strong force of cavalry, to spend a merry Christmas in northern Virginia and give the enemy a busy if somewhat less than happy New Year's. He had shot up outposts, run off horses from remount stations, plundered supply depots, burned stores of forage; now, before returning to the main Confederate Army, he had paused to visit his friend Laura Ratcliffe. And, of course, there had been a party. There was always a party when Jeb Stuart was in any one place long enough to organize one.

They were all crowding into the hallway—the officers of Stuart's staff, receiving their hats and cloaks from the servants and buckling on their weapons; the young ladies, their gay dresses showing only the first traces of wartime shabbiness; the matrons who chaperoned them; Stuart himself, the center of attention, with his hostess on his arm.

"It's a shame you can't stay longer, General," Laura Ratcliffe was saying. "It's hard on us, living in conquered territory, under enemy rule."

"Well, I won't desert you entirely, Miss Ratcliffe," Stuart told her. "I'm returning to Culpepper in the morning, as you know, but I mean to leave Captain Mosby behind with a few men, to look after the loyal Confederate people here until we can return in force and in victory."

Hearing his name, one of the men in gray turned, his hands raised to hook the fastening at the throat of his cloak. Just four days short of his thirtieth birthday, he looked even more youthful; he was considerably below average height, and so slender as to give the impression of frailness. His hair and the beard he was wearing at the time were very light brown. He wore an officer's uniform without

insignia of rank, and instead of a saber he carried a pair of 1860-model Colt .44's on his belt, with the butts to the front so that either revolver could be drawn with either hand, backhand or crossbody.

There was more than a touch of the dandy about him. The cloak he was fastening was lined with scarlet silk and the gray cock-brimmed hat the slave was holding for him was plumed with a squirrel tail. At first glance he seemed no more than one of the many young gentlemen of the planter class serving in the Confederate cavalry. But then one looked into his eyes and got the illusion of being covered by a pair of blued pistol muzzles. He had an aura of combined ruthlessness, self confidence, good humor and impudent audacity.

For an instant he stood looking inquiringly at the general. Then he realized what Stuart had said, and the blue eyes sparkled. This was the thing he had almost given up hoping for—an independent command and a chance to operate in the enemy's rear.

In 1855, John Singleton Mosby, newly graduated from the University of Virginia, had opened a law office at Bristol, Washington County, Virginia, and a year later he had married.

The son of a well-to-do farmer and slave-owner, his boyhood had been devoted to outdoor sports, especially hunting, and he was accounted an expert horseman and a dead shot, even in a society in which skill with guns and horses was taken for granted. Otherwise, the outbreak of the war had found him without military qualifications and completely uninterested in military matters. Moreover, he had been a rabid anti-secessionist.

It must be remembered, however, that, like most Southerners, he regarded secession as an entirely local issue, to be settled by the people of each state for themselves. He took no exception to the position that a state had the constitutional right to sever its connection with the Union if its people so desired. His objection to secession was based upon what he considered to be political logic. He realized that, once begun, secession was a process which could only end in reducing America to a cluster of impotent petty sovereignties, torn by hostilities, incapable of any concerted action, a fair prey to any outside aggressor.

However, he was also a believer in the paramount sovereignty of the states. He was first of all a Virginian. So, when Virginia voted in favor of secession, Mosby, while he deplored the choice, felt that he had no alternative but to accept it. He promptly enlisted in a locally organized cavalry company, the Washington Mounted Rifles, under a former U. S. officer and West Point graduate, William E. Jones.

His letters to his wife told of his early military experiences—his pleasure at receiving one of the fine new Sharps carbines which Captain Jones had wangled for his company, and, later, a Colt .44 revolver: his first taste of fire in the

Shenandoah Valley, where the company, now incorporated into Colonel Stuart's First Virginia Cavalry, were covering Johnston's march to re-enforce Beauregard: his rather passive participation in the big battle at Manassas. He was keenly disappointed at being held in reserve throughout the fighting. Long afterward, it was to be his expressed opinion that the Confederacy had lost the war by failing to follow the initial victory and exploit the rout of McDowell's army.

The remainder of 1861 saw him doing picket duty in Fairfax County. When Stuart was promoted to brigadier general, and Captain Jones took his place as colonel of the First Virginia, Mosby became the latter's adjutant. There should have been a commission along with this post, but this seems to have been snarled in red tape at Richmond and never came through. It was about this time that Mosby first came to Stuart's personal attention. Mosby spent a night at headquarters after escorting a couple of young ladies who had been living outside the Confederate lines and were anxious to reach relatives living farther south.

Stuart had been quite favorably impressed with Mosby, and when, some time later, the latter lost his place as adjutant of the First by reason of Jones' promotion to brigadier general and Fitzhugh Lee's taking over the regiment, Mosby became one of Stuart's headquarters scouts.

Scouting for Jeb Stuart was not the easiest work in the world, nor the safest, but Mosby appears to have enjoyed it, and certainly made good at it. It was he who scouted the route for Stuart's celebrated "Ride Around MacClellan" in June, 1862, an exploit which brought his name to the favorable attention of General Lee. By this time, still without commission, he was accepted at Stuart's headquarters as a sort of courtesy officer, and generally addressed as "Captain" Mosby. Stuart made several efforts to get him commissioned, but War Department red tape seems to have blocked all of them. By this time, too, Mosby had become convinced of the utter worthlessness of the saber as a cavalryman's weapon, and for his own armament adopted a pair of Colts.

The revolver of the Civil War was, of course, a percussion-cap weapon. Even with the powder and bullet contained in a combustible paper cartridge, loading such an arm was a slow process: each bullet had to be forced in the front of the chamber on top of its propellant charge by means of a hinged rammer under the barrel, and a tiny copper cap had to be placed on each nipple. It was nothing to attempt on a prancing horse. The Union cavalryman was armed with a single-shot carbine—the seven-shot Spencer repeater was not to make its battlefield appearance until late in 1863—and one revolver, giving him a total of seven shots without reloading. With a pair of six-shooters, Mosby had a five-shot advantage over any opponent he was likely to encounter. As he saw it, tactical strength lay in the number of shots which could be delivered without reloading, rather than in the number of men firing them. Once he reached a position of independent command, he

was to adhere consistently to this principle.

On July 14, 1862, General John Pope, who had taken over a newly created Union Army made up of the commands of McDowell, Banks and Fremont, issued a bombastic and tactless order to his new command, making invidious comparisons between the armies in the west and those in the east. He said, "I hear constantly of 'taking strong positions and holding them,' of 'lines of retreat,' and of 'bases of supplies.' Let us discard all such ideas. Let us study the probable lines of retreat of our opponents, and leave our own to take care of themselves."

That intrigued Mosby. If General Pope wasn't going to take care of his own rear, somebody ought to do it for him, and who better than John Mosby? He went promptly to Stuart, pointing out Pope's disinterest in his own lines of supply and communication, and asked that he be given about twenty men and detailed to get into Pope's rear and see what sort of disturbance he could create.

Stuart doubted the propriety of sending men into what was then Stonewall Jackson's territory, but he gave Mosby a letter to Jackson, recommending the bearer highly and outlining what he proposed doing, with the request that he be given some men to try it. With this letter, Mosby set out for Jackson's headquarters.

He never reached his destination. On the way, he was taken prisoner by a raiding force of New York cavalry, and arrived, instead, at Old Capitol jail in Washington. Stuart requested his exchange at once, and Mosby spent only about ten days in Old Capitol, and then was sent down the Potomac on an exchange boat, along with a number of other prisoners of war, for Hampton Roads.

The boat-load of prisoners, about to be exchanged and returned to their own army, were allowed to pass through a busy port of military embarkation and debarkation, with every opportunity to observe everything that was going on, and, to make a bad matter worse, the steamboat captain was himself a Confederate sympathizer. So when Mosby, from the exchange boat, observed a number of transports lying at anchor, he had no trouble at all in learning that they carried Burnside's men, newly brought north from the Carolinas. With the help of the steamboat captain, Mosby was able to learn that the transports were bound for Acquia Creek, on the Potomac; that meant that the re-enforcements were for Pope.

As soon as he was exchanged, Mosby made all haste for Lee's headquarters to report what he had discovered. Lee, remembering Mosby as the man who had scouted ahead of Stuart's Ride Around MacClellan, knew that he had a hot bit of information from a credible source. A dispatch rider was started off at once for Jackson, and Jackson struck Pope at Cedar Mountain before he could be re-enforced. Mosby returned to Stuart's headquarters, losing no time in promoting a pair of .44's to replace the ones lost when captured, and found his stock with Stuart at an all-time high as a result of his recent feat of espionage while in the hands of

the enemy.

So he was with Stuart when Stuart stopped at Laura Ratcliffe's home, and was on hand when Stuart wanted to make one of his characteristic gestures of gallantry. And so he finally got his independent command—all of six men—and orders to operate in the enemy's rear.

Whatever Stuart might have had in mind in leaving him behind "to look after the loyal Confederate people," John Mosby had no intention of posting himself in Laura Ratcliffe's front yard as a guard of honor. He had a theory of guerrilla warfare which he wanted to test. In part, it derived from his experiences in the Shenandoah Valley and in Fairfax County, but in larger part, it was based upon his own understanding of the fundamental nature of war.

The majority of guerrilla leaders have always been severely tactical in their thinking. That is to say, they have been concerned almost exclusively with immediate results. A troop column is ambushed, a picket post attacked, or a supply dump destroyed for the sake of the immediate loss of personnel or materiel so inflicted upon the enemy. Mosby, however, had a well-conceived strategic theory. He knew, in view of the magnitude of the war, that the tactical effects of his operations would simply be lost in the over-all picture. But, if he could create enough uproar in the Union rear, he believed that he could force the withdrawal from the front of a regiment or even a brigade to guard against his attacks and, in some future battle, the absence of that regiment or brigade might tip the scale of battle or, at least, make some future Confederate victory more complete or some defeat less crushing.

As soon as Stuart's column started southward, Mosby took his six men across Bull Run Mountain to Middleburg, where he ordered them to scatter out, billet themselves at outlying farms, and meet him at the Middleburg hotel on the night of January 10. Meanwhile he returned alone to Fairfax County, spending the next week making contacts with the people and gathering information.

On the night of Saturday, January 10, he took his men through the gap at Aldie and into Fairfax County. His first stop was at a farmhouse near Herndon Station, where he had friends, and there he met a woodsman, trapper and market hunter named John Underwood, who, with his two brothers, had been carrying on a private resistance movement against the Union occupation ever since the Confederate Army had moved out of the region. Overjoyed at the presence of regular Confederate troops, even as few as a half-dozen, Underwood offered to guide Mosby to a nearby Union picket post.

Capturing this post was no particularly spectacular feat of arms. Mosby's party dismounted about 200 yards away from it and crept up on it, to find seven members of the Fifth New York squatting around a fire, smoking, drinking coffee and trying to keep warm. Their first intimation of the presence of any enemy nearer

than the Rappahannock River came when Mosby and his men sprang to their feet, leveled revolvers and demanded their surrender. One cavalryman made a grab for his carbine and Mosby shot him; the others put up their hands. The wounded man was given first aid, wrapped in a blanket and placed beside the fire to wait until the post would be relieved. The others were mounted on their own horses and taken to Middleburg, where they were paroled i.e., released after they gave their word not to take up arms again against the Confederacy. This not entirely satisfactory handling of prisoners was the only means left open to Mosby with his small force, behind enemy lines.

The next night, Mosby stayed out of Fairfax County to allow the excitement to die down a little, but the night after, he and his men, accompanied by Underwood, raided a post where the Little River Turnpike crossed Cub Run. Then, after picking up a two-man road patrol en route, they raided another post near Fryingpan Church. This time they brought back fourteen prisoners and horses.

In all, he and his sextet had captured nineteen prisoners and twenty horses. But Mosby still wasn't satisfied. What he wanted was a few more men and orders to operate behind the Union army on a permanent basis. So, after paroling the catch of the night before, he told John Underwood to get busy gathering information and establishing contacts, and he took his six men back to Culpepper, reporting his activities to Stuart and claiming that under his existing orders he had not felt justified in staying away from the army longer. At the same time, he asked for a larger detail and orders to continue operating in northern Virginia.

In doing so, he knew he was taking a chance that Stuart would keep him at Culpepper, but as both armies had gone into winter quarters after Fredericksburg with only a minimum of outpost activity, he reasoned that Stuart would be willing to send him back. As it happened, Stuart was so delighted with the success of Mosby's brief activity that he gave him fifteen men, all from the First Virginia Cavalry, and orders to operate until recalled. On January 18, Mosby was back at Middleburg, ready to go to work in earnest.

As before, he scattered his men over the countryside, quartering them on the people. This time, before scattering them, he told them to meet him at Zion Church, just beyond the gap at Aldie, on the night of the 28th. During the intervening ten days, he was not only busy gathering information but also in an intensive recruiting campaign among the people of upper Fauquier and lower Loudoun Counties.

In this last, his best selling-point was a recent act of the Confederate States Congress called the Scott Partisan Ranger Law. This piece of legislation was, in effect, an extension of the principles of prize law and privateering to land warfare. It authorized the formation of independent cavalry companies, to be considered part of the armed forces of the Confederacy, their members to serve without

pay and mount themselves, in return for which they were to be entitled to keep any spoil of war captured from the enemy. The terms "enemy" and "spoil of war" were defined so liberally as to cover almost anything not the property of the government or citizens of the Confederacy. There were provisions, also, entitling partisan companies to draw on the Confederate government for arms and ammunition and permitting them to turn in and receive payment for any spoil which they did not wish to keep for themselves.

The law had met with considerable opposition from the Confederate military authorities, who claimed that it would attract men and horses away from the regular service and into ineffective freebooting. There is no doubt that a number of independent companies organized under the Scott Law accomplished nothing of military value. Some degenerated into mere bandit gangs, full of deserters from both sides, and terrible only to the unfortunate Confederate citizens living within their range of operations. On the other hand, as Mosby was to demonstrate, a properly employed partisan company could be of considerable use.

It was the provision about booty, however, which appealed to Mosby. As he intended operating in the Union rear, where the richest plunder could be found, he hoped that the prospect would attract numerous recruits. The countryside contained many men capable of bearing arms who had remained at home to look after their farms but who would be more than willing to ride with him now and then in hope of securing a new horse for farm work, or some needed harness, or food and blankets for their families. The regular Mosby Men called them the "Conglomerates," and Mosby himself once said that they resembled the Democrat party, being "held together only by the cohesive power of public plunder."

Mosby's first operation with his new force was in the pattern of the other two—the stealthy dismounted approach and sudden surprise of an isolated picket post. He brought back eleven prisoners and twelve horses and sets of small arms, and, as on the night of the 10th, left one wounded enemy behind. As on the previous occasions, the prisoners were taken as far as Middleburg before being released on parole.

For this reason, Mosby was sure that Colonel Sir Percy Wyndham, commander of the brigade which included the Fifth New York, Eighteenth Pennsylvania and the First Vermont, would assume that this village was the raiders' headquarters. Colonel Wyndham, a European-trained soldier, would scarcely conceive of any military force, however small, without a regular headquarters and a fixed camp. Therefore, Wyndham would come looking for him at Middleburg. So, with a companion named Fountain Beattie, Mosby put up for what remained of the night at the home of a Mr. Lorman Chancellor, on the road from Aldie a few miles east of Middleburg. The rest of the company were ordered to stay outside Middleburg.

Mosby's estimate of his opponent was uncannily accurate. The next morn-

ing, about daybreak, he and Beattie were wakened by one of the Chancellor servants and warned that a large body of Union cavalry was approaching up the road from Aldie. Peering through the window shutters, they watched about 200 men of the Fifth New York ride by, with Colonel Wyndham himself in the lead. As soon as they were out of sight up the road, Mosby and Beattie, who had hastily dressed, dashed downstairs for their horses.

"I'm going to keep an eye on these people," Mosby told Beattie. "Gather up as many men as you can, and meet me in about half an hour on the hill above Middleburg. But hurry! I'd rather have five men now than a hundred by noon."

When Beattie with six men rejoined Mosby, he found the latter sitting on a stump, munching an apple and watching the enemy through his field glasses. Wyndham, who had been searching Middleburg for "Mosby's headquarters," was just forming his men for a push on to Upperville, where he had been assured by the canny Middleburgers that Mosby had his camp.

Mosby and his men cantered down the hillside to the road as Wyndham's force moved out of the village and then broke into a mad gallop to overtake them.

It was always hard to be sure whether jackets were dirty gray or faded blue. As the Union soldier had a not unfounded belief that the Virginia woods were swarming with bushwhackers (Confederate guerillas), the haste of a few men left behind to rejoin the column was quite understandable. The rearguard pulled up and waited for them. Then, at about twenty yards' range, one of the New Yorkers, a sergeant, realized what was happening and shouted a warning:

"They're Rebs!"

Instantly one of Mosby's men, Ned Hurst, shot him dead. Other revolvers, ready drawn, banged, and several Union cavalrymen were wounded. Mosby and his followers hastily snatched the bridles of three others, disarmed them and turned, galloping away with them.

By this time, the main column, which had not halted with the rearguard, was four or five hundred yards away. There was a brief uproar, a shouting of contradictory orders, and then the whole column turned and came back at a gallop. Mosby, four of his men, and the three prisoners, got away, but Beattie and two others were captured when their horses fell on a sheet of ice treacherously hidden under the snow. There was no possibility of rescuing them. After the capture of Beattie and his companions, the pursuit stopped. Halting at a distance, Mosby saw Wyndham form his force into a compact body and move off toward Aldie at a brisk trot. He sent off the prisoners under guard of two of his men and followed Wyndham's retreat almost to Aldie without opportunity to inflict any more damage.

During his stop at Middleburg, Wyndham had heaped coals on a growing opposition to Mosby, fostered by pro-Unionists in the neighborhood. Wyndham

informed the townspeople that he would burn the town and imprison the citizens if Mosby continued the attacks on his outposts. A group of citizens, taking the threat to heart, petitioned Stuart to recall Mosby, but the general sent a stinging rebuke, telling the Middleburgers that Mosby and his men were risking their lives which were worth considerably more than a few houses and barns.

Mosby was also worried about the antipathy to the Scott Law and the partisan ranger system which was growing among some of the general officers of the Confederacy. To counteract such opposition, he needed to achieve some spectacular feat of arms which would capture the popular imagination, make a public hero of himself, and place him above criticism.

And all the while, his force was growing. The booty from his raids excited the cupidity of the more venturesome farmers, and they were exchanging the hoe for the revolver and joining him. A number of the convalescents and furloughed soldiers were arranging transfers to his command. Others, with no permanent military attachment, were drifting to Middleburg, Upperville, or Rectortown, inquiring where they might find Mosby, and making their way to join him.

There was a young Irishman, Dick Moran. There was a Fauquier County blacksmith, Billy Hibbs, who reported armed with a huge broadsword which had been the last product of his forge. There were Walter Frankland, Joe Nelson, Frank Williams and George Whitescarver, among the first to join on a permanent basis. And, one day, there was the strangest recruit of all.

A meeting was held on the 25th of February at the Blackwell farm, near Upperville, and Mosby and most of his men were in the kitchen of the farmhouse, going over a map of the section they intended raiding, when a couple of men who had been on guard outside entered, pushing a Union cavalry sergeant ahead of them.

"This Yankee says he wants to see you, Captain," one of the men announced. "He came on foot; says his horse broke a leg and had to be shot."

"Well, I'm Mosby," the guerrilla leader said. "What do you want?"

The man in blue came to attention and saluted.

"I've come here to join your company, sir," he said calmly.

There was an excited outburst from the men in the kitchen, but Mosby took the announcement in stride.

"And what's your name and unit, sergeant?"

"James F. Ames: late Fifth New York Cavalry, sir."

After further conversation, Mosby decided that the big Yankee was sincere in his avowed decision to join the forces of the Confederacy. He had some doubts about his alleged motives: the man was animated with a most vindictive hatred of the Union government, all his former officers and most of his former comrades.

No one ever learned what injury, real or fancied, had driven Sergeant Ames to desertion and treason, but in a few minutes Mosby was sure that the man was through with the Union Army.

Everybody else was equally sure that he was a spy, probably sent over by Wyndham to assassinate Mosby. Eventually Mosby proposed a test of Ames' sincerity. The deserter should guide the company to a Union picket post, and should accompany the raiders unarmed: Mosby would ride behind him, ready to shoot him at the first sign of treachery. The others agreed to judge the new recruit by his conduct on the raid. A fairly strong post, at a schoolhouse at Thompson's Corners, was selected as the objective, and they set out, sixteen men beside Ames and Mosby, through a storm of rain and sleet. Stopping at a nearby farm, Mosby learned that the post had been heavily re-enforced since he had last raided it. There were now about a hundred men at the schoolhouse.

Pleased at this evidence that his campaign to force the enemy to increase his guard was bearing fruit, Mosby decided to abandon his customary tactics of dismounting at a distance and approaching on foot. On a night like this, the enemy would not be expecting him, so the raiders advanced boldly along the road, Mosby telling Ames to make whatever answer he thought would be believed in case they were challenged. However, a couple of trigger-happy vedettes let off their carbines at them, yelled, "The Rebs are coming!" and galloped for the schoolhouse.

There was nothing to do but gallop after them, and Mosby and his band came pelting in on the heels of the vedettes. Hitherto, his raids had been more or less bloodless, but this time he had a fight on his hands, and if the men in the schoolhouse had stayed inside and defended themselves with carbine fire, they would have driven off the attack. Instead, however, they rushed outside, each man trying to mount his horse. A lieutenant and seven men were killed, about twice that number wounded, and five prisoners were taken. The rest, believing themselves attacked by about twice their own strength, scattered into the woods and got away.

Ames, who had ridden unarmed, flung himself upon a Union cavalryman at the first collision and disarmed him, then threw himself into the fight with the captured saber. His conduct during the brief battle at the schoolhouse was such as to remove from everybody's mind the suspicion that his conversion to the Confederate cause was anything but genuine. Thereafter, he was accepted as a Mosby man.

He was accepted by Mosby himself as a veritable godsend, since he was acquainted with the location of every Union force in Fairfax County, and knew of a corridor by which it would be possible to penetrate Wyndham's entire system of cavalry posts as far as Fairfax Courthouse itself. Here, then, was the making of the

spectacular coup which Mosby needed to answer his critics and enemies, both at Middleburg and at army headquarters. He decided to attempt nothing less than a raid upon Fairfax Courthouse, with the capture of Wyndham as its purpose.

This last would entail something of a sacrifice, for he had come to esteem Sir Percy highly as an opponent whose mind was an open book and whose every move could be predicted in advance. With Wyndham eliminated, he would have to go to the trouble of learning the mental processes of his successor.

However, Wyndham would be the ideal captive to grace a Mosby triumph, and a successful raid on Fairfax Courthouse, garrisoned as it was by between five and ten thousand Union troops, would not only secure Mosby's position in his own army but would start just the sort of a panic which would result in demands that the Union rear be re-enforced at the expense of the front.

So, on Sunday, March 8, Mosby led thirty-nine men through the gap at Aldie, the largest force that had followed him to date. It was the sort of a foul night that he liked for raiding, with a drizzling rain falling upon melting snow. It was pitch dark before they found the road between Centreville and Fairfax, along which a telegraph line had been strung to connect the main cavalry camp with General Stoughton's headquarters. Mosby sent one of his men, Harry Hatcher, up a pole to cut the wire. They cut another telegraph line at Fairfax Station and left the road, moving through the woods toward Fairfax Courthouse. At this time, only Mosby and Yank Ames knew the purpose of the expedition.

It was therefore with surprise and some consternation that the others realized where they were as they rode into the courthouse square and halted. A buzz of excited whispers rose from the men.

"That's right," Mosby assured them calmly. "We're in Fairfax Courthouse, right in the middle of ten thousand Yankees, but don't let that worry you. All but about a dozen of them are asleep. Now, if you all keep your heads and do what you're told, we'll be as safe as though we were in Jeff Davis' front parlor."

He then began giving instructions, detailing parties to round up horses and capture any soldiers they found awake and moving about. He went, himself, with several men, to the home of a citizen named Murray, where he had been told that Wyndham had quartered himself, but here he received the disappointing news that the Englishman had gone to Washington that afternoon.

A few minutes later, however, Joe Nelson came up with a prisoner, an infantryman who had just been relieved from sentry duty at General Stoughton's headquarters, who said that there had been a party there earlier in the evening and that Stoughton and several other officers were still there. Mosby, still disappointed at his failure to secure Wyndham, decided to accept Stoughton in his place. Taking several men, he went at once to the house where the prisoner said Stoughton had his headquarters.

Arriving there, he hammered loudly on the door with a revolver butt. An upstairs window opened, and a head, in a nightcap, was thrust out.

"What the devil's all the noise about?" its owner demanded. "Don't you know this is General Stoughton's headquarters?"

"I'd hoped it was; I almost killed a horse getting here," Mosby retorted. "Come down and open up; dispatches from Washington."

In a few moments, a light appeared inside on the first floor, and the door opened. A man in a nightshirt, holding a candle, stood in the doorway.

"I'm Lieutenant Prentiss, on General Stoughton's staff. The general's asleep. If you'll give me the dispatches ..."

Mosby caught the man by the throat with his left hand and shoved a Colt into his face with his right. Dan Thomas, beside him, lifted the candle out of the other man's hand.

"And I'm Captain Mosby, General Stuart's staff. We've just taken Fairfax Courthouse. Inside, now, and take me to the general at once."

The general was in bed, lying on his face in a tangle of bedclothes. Mosby pulled the sheets off of him, lifted the tail of his nightshirt and slapped him across the bare rump.

The effect was electric. Stoughton sat up in bed, gobbling in fury. In the dim candlelight, he mistook the gray of Mosby's tunic for blue, and began a string of bloodthirsty threats of court-martial and firing squad, interspersed with oaths.

"Easy, now, General," the perpetrator of the outrage soothed. "You've heard of John Mosby, haven't you?"

"Yes; have you captured him?" In the face of such tidings, Stoughton would gladly forget the assault on his person.

Mosby shook his head, smiling seraphically. "No, General. He's captured you. I'm Mosby."

"Oh my God!" Stoughton sank back on the pillow and closed his eyes, overcome.

Knowing the precarious nature of his present advantage, Mosby then undertook to deprive Stoughton of any hope of rescue or will to resist.

"Stuart's cavalry is occupying Fairfax Courthouse," he invented, "and Stonewall Jackson's at Chantilly with his whole force. We're all moving to occupy Alexandria by morning. You'll have to hurry and dress, General."

"Is Fitzhugh Lee here?" Stoughton asked. "He's a friend of mine; we were classmates at West Point."

"Why, no; he's with Jackson at Chantilly. Do you want me to take you to him? I can do so easily if you hurry."

It does not appear that Stoughton doubted as much as one syllable of this

remarkable set of prevarications. The Union Army had learned by bitter experience that Stonewall Jackson was capable of materializing almost anywhere. So he climbed out of bed, putting on his clothes.

On the way back to the courthouse square, Prentiss got away from them in the darkness, but Mosby kept a tight hold on Stoughton's bridle. By this time, the suspicion that all was not well in the county seat had begun to filter about. Men were beginning to turn out under arms all over town, and there was a confusion of challenges and replies and some occasional firing as hastily wakened soldiers mistook one another for the enemy. Mosby got his prisoners and horses together and started out of town as quickly as he could.

The withdrawal was made over much the same route as the approach, without serious incident. Thanks to the precaution of cutting the telegraph wires, the camp at Centreville knew nothing of what had happened at Fairfax Courthouse until long after the raiders were safely away. They lost all but thirty of the prisoners—in the woods outside Fairfax Courthouse, they escaped in droves—but they brought Stoughton and the two captains out safely.

The results were everything Mosby had hoped. He became a Confederate hero over night, and there was no longer any danger of his being recalled. There were several half-hearted attempts to kick him upstairs—an offer of a commission in the now defunct Virginia Provisional Army, which he rejected scornfully, and a similar offer in the regular Confederate States Army, which he politely declined because it would deprive his men of their right to booty under the Scott Law. Finally he was given a majority in the Confederate States Army, with authorization to organize a partisan battalion under the Scott Law. This he accepted, becoming Major Mosby of the Forty-Third Virginia Partisan Ranger Battalion.

The effect upon the enemy was no less satisfactory. When full particulars of the Fairfax raid reached Washington, Wyndham vanished from the picture, being assigned to other duties where less depended upon him. There was a whole epidemic of courts-martial and inquiries, some of which were still smouldering when the war ended. And Stoughton, the principal victim, found scant sympathy. President Lincoln, when told that the rebels had raided Fairfax to the tune of one general, two captains, thirty men and fifty-eight horses, remarked that he could make all the generals he wanted, but that he was sorry to lose the horses, as he couldn't make horses. As yet, there was no visible re-enforcement of the cavalry in Fairfax County from the front, but the line of picket posts was noticeably shortened.

About two weeks later, with forty men, Mosby raided a post at Herndon Station, bringing off a major, a captain, two lieutenants and twenty-one men, with a horse apiece. A week later, with fifty-odd men, he cut up about three times his strength of Union cavalry at Chantilly. Having surprised a small party, he had driven them into a much larger force, and the hunted had turned to hunt the hunters.

Fighting a delaying action with a few men while the bulk of his force fell back on an old roadblock of felled trees dating from the second Manassas campaign, he held off the enemy until he was sure his ambuscade was set, then, by feigning headlong flight, led them into a trap and chased the survivors for five or six miles. Wyndham and Stoughton had found Mosby an annoying nuisance; their successors were finding him a serious menace.

This attitude was not confined to the local level, but extended all the way to the top echelons. The word passed down, "Get Mosby!" and it was understood that the officer responsible for his elimination would find his military career made for him. One of the Union officers who saw visions of rapid advancement over the wreckage of Mosby's Rangers was a captain of the First Vermont, Josiah Flint by name. He was soon to have a chance at it.

On March 31, Mosby's Rangers met at Middleburg and moved across the mountain to Chantilly, expecting to take a strong outpost which had been located there. On arriving, they found the campsite deserted. The post had been pulled back closer to Fairfax after the fight of four days before. Mosby decided to move up to the Potomac and attack a Union force on the other side of Dranesville—Captain Josiah Flint's Vermonters.

They passed the night at John Miskel's farm, near Chantilly. The following morning, April 1, at about daybreak, Mosby was wakened by one of his men who had been sleeping in the barn. This man, having gone outside, had observed a small party of Union troops on the Maryland side of the river who were making semaphore signals to somebody on the Virginia side. Mosby ordered everybody to turn out as quickly as possible and went out to watch the signalmen with his field glasses. While he was watching, Dick Moran, a Mosby man who had billeted with friends down the road, arrived at a breakneck gallop from across the fields, shouting: "Mount your horses! The Yankees are coming!"

It appeared that he had been wakened, shortly before, by the noise of a column of cavalry on the road in front of the house where he had been sleeping, and had seen a strong force of Union cavalry on the march in the direction of Broad Run and the Miskel farm. Waiting until they had passed, he had gotten his horse and circled at a gallop through the woods, reaching the farm just ahead of them. It later developed that a woman of the neighborhood, whose head had been turned by the attentions of Union officers, had betrayed Mosby to Flint.

The Miskel farmhouse stood on the crest of a low hill, facing the river. Behind it stood the big barn, with a large barnyard enclosed by a high pole fence. As this was a horse farm, all the fences were eight feet high and quite strongly built. A lane ran down the slope of the hill between two such fences, and at the southern end of the slope another fence separated the meadows from a belt of woods, beyond which was the road from Dranesville, along which Flint's column

was advancing.

It was a nasty spot for Mosby. He had between fifty and sixty men, newly roused from sleep, their horses unsaddled, and he was penned in by strong fences which would have to be breached if he were to escape. His only hope lay in a prompt counterattack. The men who had come out of the house and barn were frantically saddling horses, without much attention to whose saddle went on whose mount. Harry Hatcher, who had gotten his horse saddled, gave it to Mosby and appropriated somebody else's mount.

As Flint, at the head of his cavalry, emerged from the woods, Mosby had about twenty of his men mounted and was ready to receive him. The Union cavalry paused, somebody pulled out the gate bars at the foot of the lane, and the whole force started up toward the farm. Having opened the barnyard end of the lane, Mosby waited until Flint had come about halfway, then gave him a blast of revolver fire and followed this with a headlong charge down the lane. Flint was killed at the first salvo, as were several of the men behind him. By the time Mosby's charge rammed into the head of the Union attack, the narrow lane was blocked with riderless horses, preventing each force from coming to grips with the other. Here Mosby's insistence upon at least two revolvers for each man paid off, as did the target practice upon which he was always willing to expend precious ammunition. The Union column, constricted by the fences on either side of the lane and shaken by the death of their leader and by the savage attack of men whom they had believed hopelessly trapped, turned and tried to retreat, but when they reached the foot of the lane it was discovered that some fool, probably meaning to deny Mosby an avenue of escape, had replaced the gatebars. By this time, the rest of Mosby's force had mounted their horses, breaches had been torn in the fence at either side of the lane, and there were Confederates in both meadows, firing into the trapped men. Until the gate at the lower end gave way under the weight of horses crowded against it, there was a bloody slaughter. Within a few minutes Flint and nine of his men were killed, some fifteen more were given disabling wounds, eighty-two prisoners were taken, and over a hundred horses and large quantities of arms and ammunition were captured. The remains of Flint's force was chased as far as Dranesville. Mosby was still getting the prisoners sorted out, rounding up loose horses, gathering weapons and ammunition from casualties, and giving the wounded first aid, when a Union lieutenant rode up under a flag of truce, followed by several enlisted men and two civilians of the Sanitary Commission, the Civil War equivalent of the Red Cross, to pick up the wounded and bury the dead. This officer offered to care for Mosby's wounded with his own, an offer which was declined with thanks. Mosby said he would carry his casualties with him, and the Union officer could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw only three wounded men on horse litters and one dead man tied to his saddle.

The sutlers at Dranesville had heard the firing and were about to move away

when Mosby's column appeared. Seeing the preponderance of blue uniforms, they mistook the victors for prisoners and, anticipating a lively and profitable business, unpacked their loads and set up their counters. The business was lively, but anything but profitable. The Mosby men looted them unmercifully, taking their money, their horses, and everything else they had.

All through the spring of 1863, Mosby kept jabbing at Union lines of communication in northern Virginia. In June, his majority came through, and with it authority to organize a battalion under the Scott Law. From that time on, he was on his own, and there was no longer any danger of his being recalled to the regular Army. He was responsible only to Jeb Stuart until the general's death at Yellow Tavern a year later; thereafter, he took orders from no source below General Lee and the Secretary of War.

Even before this regularization of status, Mosby's force was beginning to look like a regular outfit. From the fifteen men he had brought up from Culpepper in mid-January, its effective and dependable strength had grown to about sixty riders, augmented from raid to raid by the "Conglomerate" fringe, who were now accepted as guerrillas-pro-tem without too much enthusiasm. A new type of recruit had begun to appear, the man who came to enlist on a permanent basis. Some were Maryland secessionists, like James Williamson, who, after the war, wrote an authoritative and well-documented history of the organization, Mosby's Rangers. Some were boys like John Edmonds and John Munson, who had come of something approaching military age since the outbreak of the war. Some were men who had wangled transfers from other Confederate units. Not infrequently these men had given up commissions in the regular army to enlist as privates with Mosby. For example, there was the former clergyman, Sam Chapman, who had been a captain of artillery, or the Prussian uhlan lieutenant, Baron Robert von Massow, who gave up a captaincy on Stuart's staff, or the Englishman, Captain Hoskins, who was shortly to lose his life because of his preference for the saber over the revolver, or Captain Bill Kennon, late of Wheat's Louisiana Tigers, who had also served with Walker in Nicaragua. As a general thing, the new Mosby recruit was a man of high intelligence, reckless bravery and ultra-rugged individualism.

For his home territory, Mosby now chose a rough quadrangle between the Blue Ridge and Bull Run Mountain, bounded at its four corners by Snicker's Gap and Manassas Gap along the former and Thoroughfare Gap and Aldie Gap along the latter. Here, when not in action, the Mosby men billeted themselves, keeping widely dispersed, and an elaborate system, involving most of the inhabitants, free or slave, was set up to transmit messages, orders and warnings. In time this district came to be known as "Mosby's Confederacy," and, in the absence of any effective Confederate States civil authority, Mosby became the lawgiver and chief magistrate as well as military commander. John Munson, who also wrote a book of

reminiscences after the war, said that Mosby's Confederacy was an absolute monarchy, and that none was ever better governed in history.

Adhering to his belief in the paramount importance of firepower, Mosby saw to it that none of his men carried fewer than two revolvers, and the great majority carried four, one pair on the belt and another on the saddle. Some extremists even carried a third pair down their boot-tops, giving them thirty-six shots without reloading. Nor did he underestimate the power of mobility. Each man had his string of horses, kept where they could be picked up at need. Unlike the regular cavalryman with his one mount, a Mosby man had only to drop an exhausted animal at one of these private remount stations and change his saddle to a fresh one. As a result of these two practices, Union combat reports throughout the war consistently credited Mosby with from three to five times his actual strength.

In time, the entire economy of Mosby's Confederacy came to be geared to Mosby's operations, just as the inhabitants of seventeenth century Tortugas or Port Royal depended for their livelihood on the loot of the buccaneers. The Mosby man who lived with some farmer's family paid for his lodging with gifts of foodstuffs and blankets looted from the enemy. There was always a brisk trade in captured U. S. Army horses and mules. And there was a steady flow of United States currency into the section, so that in time Confederate money was driven out of circulation in a sort of reversal of Gresham's law. Every prisoner taken reasonably close to Army pay day could be counted on for a few dollars, and in each company there would be some lucky or skillful gambler who would have a fairly sizeable roll of greenbacks. And, of course, there was the sutler, the real prize catch; any Mosby man would pass up a general in order to capture a sutler.

And Northern-manufactured goods filtered south by the wagonload. Many of the Mosby men wore Confederate uniforms that had been tailored for them in Baltimore and even in Washington and run through the Union lines.

By mid-June, Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania had begun and the countryside along Bull Run Mountain and the Blue Ridge exploded into a series of cavalry actions as the Confederate Army moved north along the Union right. Mosby kept his little force out of the main fighting, hacking away at the Union troops from behind and confusing their combat intelligence with reports of Rebel cavalry appearing where none ought to be. In the midst of this work, he took time out to dash across into Fairfax County with sixty men, shooting up a wagon train, burning wagons, and carrying off prisoners and mules, the latter being turned over to haul Lee's invasion transport. After the two armies had passed over the Potomac, he gathered his force and launched an invasion of Pennsylvania on his own, getting as far as Mercersburg and bringing home a drove of over 200 beef cattle.

He got back to Mosby's Confederacy in time to learn of Lee's defeat at Gettysburg. Realizing that Lee's retreat would be followed by a pursuing Union

army, he began making preparations to withstand the coming deluge. For one thing, he decided to do something he had not done before—concentrate his force in a single camp on the top of Bull Run Mountain. In the days while Lee's army was trudging southward, Mosby gathered every horse and mule and cow he could find and drove them into the mountains, putting boys and slaves to work herding them. He commandeered wagons, and hauled grain and hay to his temporary camp. His men erected huts, and built corrals for horses and a stockade for prisoners. They even moved a blacksmith shop to the hidden camp. Then Mosby sat down and waited.

A few days later, Meade's army began coming through. The Forty-Third Partisan Ranger Battalion went to work immediately. For two weeks, they galloped in and out among the Union columns, returning to their hidden camp only long enough to change horses and leave the prisoners they had taken. They cut into wagon trains, scattering cavalry escorts, burning wagons, destroying supplies, blowing up ammunition, disabling cannon, running off mules. They ambushed marching infantry, flitting away before their victims had recovered from the initial surprise. Sometimes, fleeing from the scene of one attack, they would burst through a column on another road, leaving confusion behind to delay the pursuit.

Finally, the invaders passed on, the camp on the mountain top was abandoned, the Mosby men went back to their old billets, and the Forty-Third Battalion could take it easy again. That is to say, they only made a raid every couple of days and seldom fought a pitched battle more than once a week.

The summer passed; the Virginia hills turned from green to red and from red to brown. Mosby was severely wounded in the side and thigh during a fight at Gooding's Tavern on August 23, when two of his men were killed, but the raiders brought off eighty-five horses and twelve prisoners and left six enemy dead behind. The old days of bloodless sneak raids on isolated picket posts were past, now that they had enough men for two companies and Mosby rarely took the field with fewer than a hundred riders behind him.

Back in the saddle again after recovering from his wounds, Mosby devoted more attention to attacking the Orange and Alexandria and the Manassas Gap railroads and to harassing attacks for the rest of the winter.

In January, 1864, Major Cole, of the Union Maryland cavalry, began going out of his way to collide with the Forty-Third Virginia, the more so since he had secured the services of a deserter from Mosby, a man named Binns who had been expelled from the Rangers for some piece of rascality and was thirsting for revenge. Cole hoped to capitalize on Binns' defection as Mosby had upon the desertion of Sergeant Ames, and he made several raids into Mosby's Confederacy, taking a number of prisoners before the Mosby men learned the facts of the situation and everybody found a new lodging place.

On the morning of February 20, Mosby was having breakfast at a farmhouse near Piedmont Depot, on the Manassas Gap Railroad, along with John Munson and John Edmonds, the 'teen-age terrors, and a gunsmith named Jake Lavender, who was the battalion ordnance sergeant and engaged to young Edmonds' sister. Edmonds had with him a couple of Sharps carbines he had repaired for other members of the battalion and was carrying to return to the owners. Suddenly John Edmonds' younger brother, Jimmy, burst into the room with the news that several hundred Union cavalrymen were approaching. Lavender grabbed the two carbines, for which he had a quantity of ammunition, and they all ran outside.

Sending the younger Edmonds boy to bring re-enforcements, Mosby, accompanied by John Edmonds, Munson, and Jake Lavender, started to follow the enemy. He and Munson each took one of Lavender's carbines and opened fire on them, Munson killing a horse and Mosby a man. That started things off properly. Cole's Marylanders turned and gave chase, and Mosby led them toward the rendezvous with Jimmy Edmonds and the re-enforcements. Everybody arrived together, Mosby's party, the pursuers, and the re-enforcements, and a running fight ensued, with Cole's men running ahead. This mounted chase, in the best horse-opera manner, came thundering down a road past a schoolhouse just as the pupils were being let out for recess. One of these, a 14-year-old boy named Cabell Maddox, jumped onto the pony on which he had ridden to school and joined in the pursuit, armed only with a McGuffy's Third Reader. Overtaking a fleeing Yank, he aimed the book at him and demanded his surrender; before the flustered soldier realized that his captor was unarmed, the boy had snatched the Colt from his belt and was covering him in earnest. This marked the suspension, for the duration of hostilities, of young Maddox's formal education. From that hour on he was a Mosby man, and he served with distinction to the end of the war.

The chase broke off, finally, when the pursuers halted to get their prisoners and captured horses together. Then they discovered that one of their number, a man named Cobb, had been killed. Putting the dead man across his saddle, they carried the body back to Piedmont, and the next day assembled there for the funeral. The services had not yet started, and Mosby was finishing writing a report to Stuart on the previous day's action, when a scout came pelting in to report Union cavalry in the vicinity of Middleburg.

Leaving the funeral in the hands of the preacher and the civilian mourners, Mosby and the 150 men who had assembled mounted and started off. Sam Chapman, the ex-artillery captain, who had worked up from the ranks to a lieutenancy with Mosby, was left in charge of the main force, while Mosby and a small party galloped ahead to reconnoiter. The enemy, they discovered, were not Cole's men but a California battalion. They learned that this force had turned in the direction of Leesburg, and that they were accompanied by the deserter, Binns.

Mosby made up his mind to ambush the Californians on their way back to their camp at Vienna. He had plans, involving a length of rope, for his former trooper, Binns. The next morning, having crossed Bull Run Mountain the night before, he took up a position near Dranesville, with scouts out to the west. When the enemy were finally reported approaching, he was ready for them. Twenty of his 150, with carbines and rifles, were dismounted and placed in the center, under Lieutenant Mountjoy. The rest of the force was divided into two equal sections, under Chapman and Frank Williams, and kept mounted on the flanks. Mosby himself took his place with Williams on the right. While they waited, they could hear the faint boom of cannon from Washington, firing salutes in honor of Washington's Birthday.

A couple of men, posted in advance, acted as decoys, and the Union cavalry, returning empty-handed from their raid, started after them in hopes of bringing home at least something to show for their efforts. Before they knew it, they were within range of Mountjoy's concealed riflemen. While they were still in disorder from the surprise volley, the two mounted sections swept in on them in a blaze of revolver fire, and they broke and fled. There was a nasty jam in a section of fenced road, with mounted Mosby men in the woods on either side and Mountjoy's rifles behind them. Before they could get clear of this, they lost fifteen killed, fifteen more wounded, and over seventy prisoners, and the victorious Mosby men brought home over a hundred captured horses and large quantities of arms and ammunition. To their deep regret, however, Binns was not to be found either among the casualties or the prisoners. As soon as he had seen how the fight was going, the deserter had spurred off northward, never to appear in Virginia again. Mosby's own loss had been one man killed and four wounded.

For the rest of the spring, operations were routine—attacks on wagon trains and train wrecking and bridge burning on the railroads. With the cut-and-try shifting of command of the Union Army of the Potomac over and Grant in command, there was activity all over northern Virginia. About this time, Mosby got hold of a second twelve-pound howitzer, and, later, a twelve-pound Napoleon and added the Shenandoah Valley to his field of operations.

From then on, Mosby was fighting a war on two fronts, dividing his attention between the valley and the country to the east of Bull Run Mountain, his men using their spare horses freely to keep the Union rear on both sides in an uproar. The enemy, knowing the section from whence Mosby was operating, resorted to frequent counter-raiding. Often, returning from a raid, the Mosby men would find their home territory invaded and would have to intercept or fight off the invaders. At this time, Mosby was giving top priority to attacks on Union transport whether on the roads or the railroads. Wagon trains were in constant movement, both moving up the Shenandoah Valley and bound for the Army of the Potomac, in front of Petersburg. To the east was the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, to the south,

across the end of Mosby's Confederacy, was the Manassas Gap, and at the upper end of the valley was the B. & O. The section of the Manassas Gap Railroad along the southern boundary of Mosby's Confederacy came in for special attention, and the Union Army finally gave it up for a bad job and abandoned it. This writer's grandfather, Captain H. B. Piper, of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, did a stint of duty guarding it, and until he died he spoke with respect of the abilities of John S. Mosby and his raiders. Locomotives were knocked out with one or another of Mosby's twelve-pounders. Track was torn up and bridges were burned. Land-mines were planted. Trains were derailed and looted, usually with sharp fighting.

By mid-July, Mosby had been promoted to lieutenant colonel and had a total strength of around 300 men, divided into five companies. His younger brother, William Mosby, had joined him and was acting as his adjutant. He now had four guns, all twelve-pounders—two howitzers, the Napoleon and a new rifle, presented to him by Jubal Early. He had a compact, well-disciplined and powerful army-in-miniature. After the Union defeat at Kernstown, Early moved back to the lower end of the Shenandoah Valley, and McCausland went off on his raid in to Pennsylvania, burning Chambersburg in retaliation for Hunter's burnings at Lexington and Buchanan in Virginia. Following his customary practice, Mosby made a crossing at another point and raided into Maryland as far as Adamstown, skirmishing and picking up a few prisoners and horses.

Early's invasion of Maryland, followed as it was by McCausland's sack of Chambersburg, was simply too much for the Union command. The Shenandoah situation had to be cleaned up immediately, and, after some top-echelon dickering, Grant picked Phil Sheridan to do the cleaning. On August 7, Sheridan assumed command of the heterogeneous Union forces in the Shenandoah and began welding them into an army. On the 10th, he started south after Early, and Mosby, who generally had a good idea of what was going on at Union headquarters, took a small party into the valley, intending to kidnap the new commander as he had Stoughton. Due mainly to the vigilance of a camp sentry, the plan failed, but Mosby picked up the news that a large wagon train was being sent up the valley, and he decided to have a try at this.

On the evening of the 12th, he was back in the valley with 330 men and his two howitzers. Spending the night at a plantation on the right bank of the Shenandoah River, he was on the move before daybreak, crossing the river and pushing toward Berryville, with scouts probing ahead in the heavy fog. One of the howitzers broke a wheel and was pushed into the brush and left behind. As both pieces were of the same caliber, the caisson was taken along. A lieutenant and fifteen men, scouting ahead, discovered a small empty wagon train, going down the valley in the direction of Harper's Ferry, and they were about to attack it when they heard, in the distance, the rumbling of many heavily loaded wagons. This

was the real thing. They forgot about the empty wagons and hastened back to Mosby and the main force to report.

Swinging to the left to avoid premature contact with the train, Mosby hurried his column in the direction of Berryville. On the way, he found a disabled wagon, part of the north-bound empty train, with the teamster and several infantrymen sleeping in it. These were promptly secured, and questioning elicited the information that the south-bound train consisted of 150 wagons, escorted by 250 cavalry and a brigade of infantry. Getting into position on a low hill overlooking the road a little to the east of Berryville, the howitzer was unlimbered and the force was divided on either side of it, Captain Adolphus Richards taking the left wing and Sam Chapman the right. Mosby himself remained with the gun. Action was to be commenced with the gun, and the third shot was to be the signal for both Richards and Chapman to charge.

At just the right moment, the fog lifted. The gun was quickly laid on the wagon train and fired, the first shot beheading a mule. The second shell hit the best sort of target imaginable—a mobile farrier's forge. There was a deadly shower of horseshoes, hand-tools and assorted ironmongery, inflicting casualties and causing a local panic. The third shell landed among some cavalry who were galloping up, scattering them, and, on the signal, Richards and Chapman charged simultaneously.

Some infantry at the head of the train met Richards with a volley, costing him one man killed and several wounded and driving his charge off at an angle into the middle of the train. The howitzer, in turn, broke up the infantry. Chapman, who had hit the rear of the train, was having easier going: his men methodically dragged the teamsters from their wagons, unhitched mules, overturned, looted and burned wagons. The bulk of the escort, including the infantry, were at the front of the train, with Richards' men between them and Chapman. Richards, while he had his hands full with these, was not neglecting the wagons, either, though he was making less of a ceremony of it. A teamster was shot and dragged from his wagon-seat, a lighted bundle of inflammables tossed into the wagon, and pistols were fired around the mules' heads to start them running. The faster they ran, the more the flames behind them were fanned, and as the wagon went careening down the road, other wagons were ignited by it.

By 8 a. m., the whole thing was over. The escort had been scattered, the wagons were destroyed, and the victors moved off, in possession of 500-odd mules, thirty-six horses, about 200 head of beef cattle, 208 prisoners, four Negro slaves who had been forcibly emancipated to drive Army wagons, and large quantities of supplies. In one of the wagons, a number of violins, probably equipment for some prototype of the U.S.O., were found; the more musically inclined guerrillas appropriated these and enlivened the homeward march with music.

Of course, there was jubilation all over Mosby's Confederacy on their return. The mules were herded into the mountains, held for about a week, and then started off for Early's army. The beef herd was divided among the people, and there were barbecues and feasts. A shadow was cast over the spirits of the raiders, however, when the prisoners informed them, with considerable glee, that the train had been carrying upwards of a million dollars, the pay for Sheridan's army. Even allowing for exaggeration, the fact that they had overlooked this treasure was a bitter pill for the Mosbyites. According to local tradition, however, the fortune was not lost completely; there were stories of a Berryville family who had been quite poor before the war but who blossomed into unexplained affluence afterward.

Less than a week later, on August 19, Mosby was in the valley again with 250 men, dividing his force into several parties after crossing the river at Castleman's Ford. Richards, with "B" Company, set off toward Charlestown. Mosby himself took "A" toward Harper's Ferry on an uneventful trip during which the only enemies he encountered were a couple of stragglers caught pillaging a springhouse. It was Chapman, with "C" and "D," who saw the action on this occasion.

Going to the vicinity of Berryville, he came to a burning farmhouse, and learned that it had been fired only a few minutes before by some of Custer's cavalry. Leaving a couple of men to help the family control the fire and salvage their possessions, he pressed on rapidly. Here was the thing every Mosby man had been hoping for—a chance to catch house burners at work. They passed a second blazing house and barn, dropping off a couple more men to help fight fire, and caught up with the incendiaries, a company of Custer's men, just as they were setting fire to a third house. Some of these, knowing the quality of mercy they might expect from Mosby men, made off immediately at a gallop. About ninety of them, however, tried to form ranks and put up a fight. The fight speedily became a massacre. Charging with shouts of "No quarters!", Chapman's men drove them into a maze of stone fences and killed about a third of them before the rest were able to extricate themselves.

This didn't stop the house burnings, by any means. The devastation of the Shenandoah Valley had been decided upon as a matter of strategy, and Sheridan was going through with it. The men who were ordered to do the actual work did not have their morale improved any by the knowledge that Mosby's Rangers were refusing quarter to incendiary details, however, and, coming as it did on the heels of the wagon train affair of the 13th, Sheridan was convinced that something drastic would have to be done about Mosby. Accordingly, he set up a special company, under a Captain William Blazer, each man armed with a pair of revolvers and a Spencer repeater, to devote their entire efforts to eliminating Mosby and his organized raiders.

On September 3, this company caught up with Joe Nelson and about 100 men in the valley and gave them a sound drubbing, the first that the Mosby men had experienced for some time. It was a humiliating defeat for them, and, on the other side, it was hailed as the beginning of the end of the Mosby nuisance. A few days later, while raiding to the east of Bull Run Mountain, Mosby was wounded again, and was taken to Lynchburg. He was joined by his wife, who remained with him at Lynchburg and at Mosby's Confederacy until the end of the war.

During his absence, the outfit seems to have been run by a sort of presidium of the senior officers. On September 22, Sam Chapman took 120 men into the valley to try to capture a cavalry post supposed to be located near Front Royal, but, arriving there, he learned that his information had been incorrect and that no such post existed. Camping in the woods, he sent some men out as scouts, and the next morning they reported a small wagon train escorted by about 150 cavalry, moving toward Front Royal. Dividing his force and putting half of it under Walter Frankland, he planned to attack the train from the rear while Frankland hit it from in front. After getting into position, he kept his men concealed, waiting for the wagons to pass, and as it did, he realized that his scouts had seen only a small part of it. The escort looked to him like about three regiments. Ordering his men to slip away as quietly as possible, he hurried to reach Frankland.

"Turn around, Walter!" he yelled. "Get your men out of here! You're attacking a whole brigade!"

"What of it?" Frankland replied. "Why, Sam, we have the bastards on the run already!"

Chapman, the erstwhile clergyman, turned loose a blast of theological language in purely secular connotation. Frankland, amazed at this blasphemous clamor from his usually pious comrade, realized that it must have been inspired by something more than a little serious, and began ordering his men to fall back. Before they had all gotten away, two of the three Union regiments accompanying the wagons came galloping up and swamped them. Most of the men got away but six of them, Anderson, Carter, Overby, Love, Rhodes and Jones, were captured.

Late that night some of the stragglers, making their way back to Mosby's Confederacy on foot, reported the fate of these six men. They had been taken into Front Royal, and there, at the personal order of General George A. Custer, and under circumstances of extreme brutality, they had all been hanged. Rhodes' mother, who lived in Front Royal, had been forced to witness the hanging of her son.

To put it conservatively, there was considerable excitement in Mosby's Confederacy when the news of this atrocity was received. The senior officers managed to restore a measure of calmness, however, and it was decided to wait until Mosby returned before taking any action on the matter.

In addition to the hangings at Front Royal, Custer was acquiring a bad reputation because of his general brutality to the people of the Shenandoah Valley. After the battle of the Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull would have probably won any popularity contest in northern Virginia without serious competition.

On September 29, Mosby was back with his command; his wound had not been as serious as it might have been for the bullet had expended most of its force against the butt of one of the revolvers in his belt. Operations against the railroads had been allowed to slacken during Mosby's absence; now they were stepped up again. Track was repeatedly torn up along the Manassas Gap line, and there were attacks on camps and strong points, and continual harassing of wood-cutting parties obtaining fuel for the locomotives. The artillery was taken out, and trains were shelled. All this, of course, occasioned a fresh wave of Union raids into the home territory of the raiders, during one of which Yank Ames, who had risen to a lieutenancy in the Forty-Third, was killed.

The most desperate efforts were being made, at this time, to keep the Manassas Gap Railroad open, and General C. C. Augur, who had charge of the railroad line at the time, was arresting citizens indiscriminately and forcing them to ride on the trains as hostages. Mosby obtained authorization from Lee's headquarters to use reprisal measures on officers and train crews of trains on which citizens were being forced to ride, and also authority to execute prisoners from Custer's command in equal number to the men hanged at Front Royal and elsewhere.

It was not until November that he was able to secure prisoners from Custer's brigade, it being his intention to limit his retaliation to men from units actually involved in the hangings. On November 6, he paraded about twenty-five such prisoners and forced them to draw lots, selecting, in this manner, seven of them—one for each of the men hanged at Front Royal and another for a man named Willis who had been hanged at Gaines' Cross Roads several weeks later. It was decided that they should be taken into the Shenandoah Valley and hanged beside the Valley Pike, where their bodies could serve as an object lesson. On the way, one of them escaped. Four were hanged, and then, running out of rope, they prepared to shoot the other two. One of these got away during a delay caused by defective percussion caps on his executioner's revolver.

A sign was placed over the bodies, setting forth the reason for their execution, and Mosby also sent one of his men under a flag of truce to Sheridan's headquarters, with a statement of what had been done and why, re-enforced with the intimation that he had more prisoners, including a number of officers, in case his messenger failed to return safely. Sheridan replied by disclaiming knowledge of the Front Royal hangings, agreeing that Mosby was justified in taking reprisals, and assuring the Confederate leader that hereafter his men would be given proper

treatment as prisoners of war. There was no repetition of the hangings.

By this time the Shenandoah Valley campaign as such was over. The last Confederate effort to clear Sheridan out of the Valley had failed at Cedar Creek on October 19, and the victor was going methodically about his task of destroying the strategic and economic usefulness of the valley. How well he succeeded in this was best expressed in Sheridan's own claim that a crow flying over the region would have to carry his own rations. The best Mosby could do was to launch small raiding parties to harass the work of destruction.

By the beginning of December, the northern or Loudoun County end of Mosby's Confederacy was feeling the enemy scourge as keenly as the valley, and the winter nights were lighted with the flames of burning houses and barns. For about a week, while this was going on, Mosby abandoned any attempt at organized action. His men, singly and in small parties, darted in and out among the invaders, sniping and bushwhacking, attacking when they could and fleeing when they had to, and taking no prisoners. When it was over, the northern end of Mosby's Confederacy was in ashes and most of the people had "refugeed out," but Mosby's Rangers, as a fighting force, was still intact. On December 17, for instance, while Mosby was in Richmond conferring with General Lee, they went into the valley again in force, waylaying a column of cavalry on the march, killing and wounding about thirty and bringing off 168 prisoners and horses.

When Mosby came back from Lee's headquarters, a full colonel now, his brother William was made a lieutenant-colonel, and Richards became a major. The southern, or Fauquier County, end of Mosby's Confederacy was still more or less intact, though crowded with refugees. There was even time, in spite of everything, for the wedding of the Forty-Third's armorer, Jake Lavender, with John and Jimmy Edmonds' sister.

While the wedding party was in progress, a report was brought in to the effect that Union cavalry were in the neighborhood of Salem, a few miles away. Mosby took one of his men, Tom Love, a relative of one of the Front Royal victims, and went to investigate, finding that the enemy had moved in the direction of Rectortown, where they were making camp for the night. Sending a resident of the neighborhood to alert Chapman and Richards for an attack at daybreak, Mosby and Love set out to collect others of his command.

By this time, it was dark, with a freezing rain covering everything with ice. Mosby and Love decided to stop at the farm of Ludwell Lake for something to eat before going on; Love wanted to stay outside on guard, but Mosby told him to get off his horse and come inside. As they would have been in any house in the neighborhood, Mosby and his companion were welcomed as honored guests and sat down with the family to a hearty meal of spareribs.

While they were eating, the house was surrounded by Union cavalry. Mosby

rushed to the back door, to find the backyard full of soldiers. He started for the front door, but as he did, it burst open and a number of Yankees, officers and men, entered the house. At the same time, the soldiers behind, having seen the back door open and shut, began firing at the rear windows, and one bullet hit Mosby in the abdomen. In the confusion, with the women of the Lake family screaming, the soldiers cursing, and bullets coming through the windows, the kitchen table was overturned and the lights extinguished. Mosby in the dark, managed to crawl into a first-floor bedroom, where he got off his tell-tale belt and coat, stuffing them under the bed. Then he lay down on the floor.

After a while, the shooting outside stopped, the officers returned, and the candles were relighted. The Union officers found Mosby on the floor, bleeding badly, and asked the family who he was. They said, of course, that they did not know, and neither did Tom Love—he was only a Confederate officer on his way to rejoin his command, who had stopped for a night's lodging. There was a surgeon with the Union detachment. After they got most of Mosby's clothes off and put him on the bed, he examined the wounded Confederate and pronounced his wound mortal. When asked his name and unit, Mosby, still conscious, hastily improvised a false identity, at the same time congratulating himself on having left all his documents behind when starting on this scouting trip. Having been assured, by medical authority, that he was as good as dead, the Union officers were no longer interested in him and soon went away.

Fortunately, on his visit to Lee's headquarters, Mosby had met an old schoolmate, a Dr. Montiero, who was now a surgeon with the Confederate Army, and, persuading him to get a transfer, had brought him back with him. Montiero's new C.O. was his first patient in his new outfit. Early the next morning, he extracted the bullet. The next night Mosby was taken to Lynchburg.

Despite the Union doctor's pronouncement of his impending death, Mosby was back in action again near the end of February, 1865. His return was celebrated with another series of raids on both sides of the mountains. It was, of course, obvious to everybody that the sands of the Confederacy were running out, but the true extent of the debacle was somewhat obscured to Mosby's followers by their own immediate successes. Peace rumors began drifting about, the favorite item of wishthinking being that the Union government was going to recognize the Confederacy and negotiate a peace in return for Confederate help in throwing the French out of Mexico. Of course, Mosby himself never believed any such nonsense, but he continued his attacks as though victory were just around the corner. On April 5, two days after the Union army entered Richmond, a party of fifty Mosby men caught their old enemies, the Loudoun Rangers, in camp near Halltown and beat them badly. On April 9, the day of Lee's surrender, "D" Company and the newly organized "H" Company fired the last shots for the Forty-Third Virginia in a skirmish in Fairfax County. Two days later, Mosby received a message from General

Hancock, calling for his surrender.

He sent a group of his officers—William Mosby, Sam Chapman, Walter Frankland and Dr. Montiero—with a flag of truce, and, after several other meetings with Hancock, the command was disbanded and most of the men went in to take the parole.

When his armistice with Hancock expired, Mosby found himself with only about forty irreconcilables left out of his whole command. As General Joe Johnston had not yet surrendered, he did not feel justified in getting out of the fight, himself. With his bloodied but unbowed handful, he set out on the most ambitious project of his entire military career—nothing less than a plan to penetrate into Richmond and abduct General Grant. If this scheme succeeded, it was his intention to dodge around the Union Army, carry his distinguished prisoner to Johnston, and present him with a real bargaining point for negotiating terms.

They reached the outskirts of Richmond and made a concealed camp across the river, waiting for darkness. In the meanwhile, two of the party, both natives of the city, Munson and Cole Jordan, went in to scout. Several hours passed, and neither returned. Mosby feared that they had been picked up by Union patrols. He was about to send an older man, Lieutenant Ben Palmer, when a canal-boat passed, and, hailing it, they learned of Johnston's surrender.

That was the end of the scheme to kidnap Grant. As long as a Confederate force was still under arms, it would have been a legitimate act of war. Now, it would be mere brigandage, and Mosby had no intention of turning brigand.

So Mosby returned to Fauquier County to take the parole. For him, the fighting was over, but he was soon to discover that the war was not. At that time, Edwin M. Stanton was making frantic efforts to inculpate as many prominent Confederates as possible in the Booth conspiracy, and Mosby's name was suggested as a worthy addition to Stanton's long and fantastic list of alleged conspirators. A witness was produced to testify that Mosby had been in Washington on the night of the assassination, April 14. At that time, Stanton was able to produce a witness to almost anything he wanted to establish. Fortunately, Mosby had an alibi; at the time in question, he had been at Hancock's headquarters, discussing armistice terms; even Stanton couldn't get around that.

However, he was subjected to considerable petty persecution, and once he was flung into jail without charge and held incommunicado. His wife went to Washington to plead his case before President Johnson, who treated her with a great deal less than courtesy, and then before General Grant, who promptly gave her a written order for her husband's release.

Then, in 1868, he did something which would have been social and political suicide for any Southerner with a less imposing war record. He supported Ulysses S. Grant for President. It was about as unexpected as any act in an extremely un-

conventional career, and, as usual, he had a well-reasoned purpose. Grant, he argued, was a professional soldier, not a politician. His enmity toward the South had been confined to the battlefield and had ended with the war. He had proven his magnanimity to the defeated enemy, and as President, he could be trusted to show fairness and clemency to the South.

While Virginia had not voted in the election of 1868, there is no question that Mosby's declaration of support helped Grant, and Grant was grateful, inviting Mosby to the White House after his inauguration and later appointing him to the United States consulate at Hong Kong. After the expiration of his consular service, Mosby resumed his law practice, eventually taking up residence in Washington. He found time to write several books—war reminiscences and memoirs, and a volume in vindication of his former commander, Jeb Stuart, on the Confederate cavalry in the Gettysburg campaign. He died in Washington, at the age of eighty-three, in 1916.

The really important part of John Mosby's career, of course, was the two years and three months, from January, 1863, to April, 1865, in which he held independent command. With his tiny force—it never exceeded 500 men—he had compelled the Union army to employ at least one and often as high as three brigades to guard against his depredations, and these men, held in the rear, were as much out of the war proper as though they had been penned up in Andersonville or Libby Prison.

In addition to this, every northward movement of the Confederate Army after January, 1863, was accompanied by a diversionary operation of Mosby's command, sometimes tactically insignificant but always contributing, during the critical time of the operation, to the uncertainty of Union intelligence. Likewise, every movement to the south of the Army of the Potomac was harassed from behind.

It may also be noted that Sheridan, quite capable of dealing with the menace of Stuart, proved helpless against the Mosby nuisance, although, until they were wiped out, Blazer's Scouts were the most efficient anti-Mosby outfit ever employed. In spite of everything that was done against them, however, Mosby's Rangers stayed in business longer than Lee's army, and when they finally surrendered, it was not because they, themselves, had been defeated, but because the war had been literally jerked out from under them.

Mosby made the cavalry a formidable amalgamation of fire power and mobility and his influence on military history was felt directly, and survived him by many years. In his last days, while living in Washington, the old Confederate guerrilla had a youthful friend, a young cavalry lieutenant fresh from West Point, to whom he enjoyed telling the stories of his raids and battles and to whom he preached his gospel of fire and mobility. This young disciple of Mosby's old age

was to make that gospel his own, and to practice it, later, with great success. The name of this young officer was George S. Patton, Jr.

Jeb Stuart left John Singleton Mosby behind Northern lines "to look after loyal Confederate people." But before the war was over, Mosby did a lot more than that....

## ROUGH TRANSLATION

*Don't be ashamed if you can't blikkel any more. It's because you couldn't help framishing.*

"Shurgub," said the tape recorder. "Just like I told you before, Dr. Blair, it's krandoor, so don't expect to vrillipax, because they just won't stand for any. They'd sooner framish."

"Framish?" Jonathan heard his own voice played back by the recorder, tinny and slightly nasal. "What is that, Mr. Easton?"

"*You* know. Like when you guttip. Carooms get awfully bevvergrit. Why, I saw one actually—"

"Let's go back a little, shall we?" Jonathan suggested. "What does shurgub mean?"

There was a pause while the machine hummed and the recorder tape whirred. Jonathan remembered the look on Easton's face when he had asked him that. Easton had pulled away slightly, mouth open, eyes hurt.

"Why—why, I *told* you!" he had shouted. "Weeks ago! What's the matter? Don't you blikkel English?"

Jonathan Blair reached out and snapped the switch on the machine. Putting his head in his hands, he stared down at the top of his desk.

You learned Navajo in six months, he reminded himself fiercely.

You are a highly skilled linguist. What's the matter? Don't you blikkel English?

He groaned and started searching through his briefcase for the reports from Psych. Easton must be insane. He must! Ramirez says it's no language. Stoughton says it's no language. And *I*, Jonathan thought savagely, say it's no language.

But—

Margery tiptoed into the study with a tray.

"But Psych," he continued aloud to her, "Psych says it *must* be a language

because, they say, Easton is *not* insane!''

''Oh, dear,'' sighed Margery, blinking her pale blue eyes. ''That again?'' She set his coffee on the desk in front of him. ''Poor Jonathan. Why doesn't the Institute give up?''

''Because they can't.'' He reached for the cup and sat glaring at the steaming coffee.

''Well,'' said his wife, settling into the leather chair beside him, '' *I* certainly would. My goodness, it's been over a month now since he came back, and you haven't learned a thing from him!''

''Oh, we've learned some. And this morning, for the first time, Easton himself began to seem puzzled by a few of the things he was saying. He's beginning to use terms we can understand. He's coming around. And if I could only find some clue—some sort of—''

Margery snorted. ''It's just plain foolish! I knew the Institute was asking for trouble when they sent the *Rhinestead* off. How do they know Easton ever got to Mars, anyway? Maybe he did away with those other men, cruised around, and then came back to Earth with this made-up story just so he could seem to be a hero and—''

''That's nonsense!''

''Why?'' she demanded stubbornly. ''Why is it?''

''Because the *Rhinestead* was tracked, for one thing, on both flights, to and from Mars. Moonbase has an indisputable record of it. And besides, the instruments on the ship itself show—'' He found the report he had been searching for. ''Oh, never mind.''

''All right,'' she said defiantly. ''Maybe he did get to Mars. Maybe he did away with the crew after he got there. He knew the ship was built so that one man could handle it in an emergency. Maybe he—''

''Look,'' said Jonathan patiently. ''He didn't do anything of the sort. Easton has been checked so thoroughly that it's impossible to assume anything except, (a) he is sane, (b) he reached Mars and made contact with the Martians, (c) this linguistic barrier is a result of that contact.''

Margery shook her head, sucking in her breath. ''When I think of all those fine young men,'' she murmured. ''Heaven only knows what happened to them!''

''You,'' Jonathan accused, ''have been reading that columnist—what's-his-name? The one that's been writing such claptrap ever since Easton brought the *Rhinestead* back alone.''

''Cuddlehorn,'' said his wife. ''Roger Cuddlehorn, and it's not claptrap.''

''The other members of the crew are all alive, all—''

''I suppose Easton told you that?'' she interrupted.

"Yes, he did."

"Using double-talk, of course," said his wife triumphantly. At the look on Jonathan's face, she stood up in guilty haste. "All right, I'll go!" She blew him a kiss from the door. "Richie and I are having lunch at one. Okay? Or would you rather have a tray in here?"

"Tray," he said, turning back to his desk and his coffee. "No, on second thought, call me when lunch is ready. I'll need a break."

He was barely conscious of the closing of the door as Margery left the room. Naturally he didn't take her remarks seriously, but—

He opened the folder of pictures and studied them again, along with the interpretations by Psych, Stoughton, Ramirez and himself.

Easton had drawn the little stick figures on the first day of his return. The interpretations all checked—and they had been done independently, too. There it is, thought Jonathan. Easton lands the *Rhinestead*. He and the others meet the Martians. They are impressed by the Martians. The others stay on Mars. Easton returns to Earth, bearing a message.

Question: What is the message?

Teeth set, Jonathan put away the pictures and went back to the tape on the recorder. "Yes," said his own voice, in answer to Easton's outburst. "I do—er—blikkel English. But tell me, Mr. Easton, do you understand me?"

"Under-stand?" The man seemed to have difficulty forming the word. "You mean—" Pause. "Dr. Blair, I murv you. Is that it?"

"Murv," repeated Jonathan. "All right, you murv me. Do you murv this? I do not always murv what you say."

A laugh. "Of course not. How could you?" Suppressed groan. "Carooms," Easton had murmured, almost inaudibly. "Just when I almost murv, the kwakut goes freeble."

Jonathan flipped the switch on the machine. "Murv" he wrote on his pad of paper. He added "Blikkel," "Carooms" and "Freeble." He stared at the list. He should understand, he thought. At times it seemed as if he did and then, in the next instant, he was lost again, and Easton was angry, and they had to start all over again.

Sighing, he took out more papers, notes from previous sessions, both with himself and with other linguists. The difficulty of reaching Easton was unlike anything he had ever before tackled. The six months of Navajo had been rough going, but he had done it, and done it well enough to earn the praise of Old Comas, his informant. Surely, he thought, after mastering a language like that, one in which the student must not only learn to imitate difficult sounds, but also learn a whole new pattern of thought—

Pattern of thought. Jonathan sat very still, as though movement would send the fleeting clue back into the corner from which his mind had glimpsed it.

A whole new frame of reference. Suppose, he toyed with the thought, suppose the Martian language, whatever it was, was structured along the lines of Navajo, involving clearly defined categories which did not exist in English.

"Murv," he said aloud. "I murv a lesson, but I blikkel a language."

Eagerly, Jonathan reached again for the switch. Categories clearly defined, yes! But the categories of the Martian language were not those of the concrete or the particular, like the Navajo. They were of the abstract. Where one word "understand" would do in English, the Martian used two—

Good Lord, he realized, they might use hundreds! They might—

Jonathan turned on the machine, sat back and made notes, letting the recorder run uninterrupted. He made his notes, this time, on the feelings he received from the words Easton used. When the first tape was done, he put on the second.

Margery tapped at the door just as the third tape was ending. "In a minute," he called, scribbling furiously. He turned off the machine, put out his cigarette and went to lunch, feeling better than he had in weeks.

Richie was at the kitchen sink, washing his hands.

"And next time," Margery was saying, "you wash up before you sit down."

Richie blinked and watched Jonathan seat himself. "Daddy didn't wash his hands," he said.

Margery fixed the six-year-old with a stern eye. "Richard, don't be rude."

"Well, he didn't." Richie sat down and reached for his glass of milk.

"Daddy probably washed before he came in," said Margery. She took the cover off a tureen, ladled soup into bowls and passed sandwiches, pretending not to see the ink-stained hand Jonathan was hiding in his lap.

Jonathan, elated by the promise of success, ate three or four sandwiches, had two bowls of soup and finally sat back while Margery went to get coffee.

Richie slid part way off his chair, remembered, and slid back on again. "Kin I go?" he asked.

"Please may I be excused," corrected his father.

Richie repeated, received a nod and ran out of the dinette and through the kitchen, grabbing a handful of cookies on the way. The screen door banged behind him as he raced into the backyard.

"Richie!" Margery started after him, eyes ablaze. Then she stopped and came back to the table with the coffee. "That boy! How long does it take before they get to be civilized?" Jonathan laughed. "Oh, sure," she went on, sitting down opposite him. "It's funny to you. But if you were here all day long—" She stirred

sugar into her cup. "We should have sent him to camp, even if it would have wrecked the budget!"

"Oh? Is it that bad?"

Margery shuddered. "Sometimes he's a perfect angel, and then—It's unbelievable, the things that child can think of! Sometimes I'm convinced children are another species altogether! Why, only this morning—"

"Well," Jonathan broke in, "next summer he goes to camp." He stood up and stretched.

Margery said wistfully, "I suppose you want to get back to work."

"Ummmm." Jonathan leaned over and kissed her briefly. "I've got a new line of attack," he said, picking up his coffee. He patted his wife's shoulder. "If things work out well, we might get away on that vacation sooner than we thought."

"Really?" she asked, brightening.

"Really." He left the table and went back to his den.

Putting the next tape on the machine, he settled down to his job. Time passed and finally there were no more tapes to listen to.

He stacked his notes and began making lists, checking through the sheets of paper for repetitions of words Easton had used, listing the various connotations which had occurred to Jonathan while he had listened to the tapes.

As he worked, he was struck by the similarity of the words he was recording to the occasional bits of double-talk he had heard used by comedians in theaters and on the air, and he allowed his mind to wander a bit, exploring the possibilities.

Was Martian actually such a close relative to English? Or had the Martians learned English from Easton, and had Easton then formed a sort of pidgin-English-Martian of his own?

Jonathan found it difficult to believe in the coincidence of the two languages being alike, unless—

He laughed. Unless, of course, Earthmen were descended from Martians, or vice versa. Oh, well, not my problem, he thought jauntily.

He stared at the list before him and then he started to swear, softly at first, then louder. But no matter how loudly he swore, the list remained undeniably and obstinately the same:

Freeble—Displeasure (Tape 3)

Freeble—Elation (Tape 4)

Freeble—Grief (Tape 5)

"How," he asked the empty room, "can a word mean grief and elation at the same time?"

Jonathan sat for a few moments in silence, thinking back to the start of the sessions with Easton. Ramirez and Stoughton had both agreed with him that Easton's speech was phonemically identical to English. Jonathan's trained ear remembered the pronunciation of "Freeble" in the three different connotations and he forced himself to admit it was the same on all three tapes in question.

Stuck again, he thought gloomily.

Good-by, vacation!

He lit a cigarette and stared at the ceiling. It was like saying the word "die" meant something happy and something sad at one and the same, like saying—

Jonathan pursed his lips. Yes, it could be. If someone were in terrible pain, death, while a thing of sorrow, could also mean release from suffering and so become a thing of joy. Or it could mean sorrow to one person and relief to another. In that case, what he was dealing with here was not only—

The crash of the ball, as it sailed through the window behind his desk, lifted Jonathan right from his chair. Furious, his elusive clue shattered as surely as the pane of glass, he strode to the window.

"Richie!"

His son, almost hidden behind the lilac bush, did not answer.

"I see you!" Jonathan bellowed. "Come here!"

The bush stirred slightly and Richie peeped through the leaves. "Did you call me, Daddy?" he asked politely.

Jonathan clamped his lips shut and pointed to the den. Richie tried a smile as he sidled around the bush, around his father, and into the house.

"My," he marveled, looking at the broken glass on the floor inside. "My goodness!" He sat down in the leather chair to which Jonathan motioned.

"Richie," said his father, when he could trust his voice again, "how did it happen?"

His son's thin legs, brown and wiry, stuck out straight from the depths of the chair. There was a long scratch on one calf and numerous black-and-blue spots around both knees.

"I dunno," said Richie. He blinked his eyes, deeper blue than Margery's, and reached up one hand to push away the mass of blond hair tumbling over his forehead. He was obviously trying hard to pretend he wasn't in the room at all.

Jonathan said, "Now, son, that is not a good answer. What were you doing when the ball went through the window?"

"Watching," said Richie truthfully.

"How did it *go* through the window?"

"Real fast."

Jonathan found his teeth were clamped. No wonder he couldn't decode Easton's speech—he couldn't even talk with his own son!

"I mean," he explained, his patience wavering, "you threw the ball so that it broke the window, didn't you?"

"I didn't mean it to," said Richie.

"All right. That's what I wanted to know." He started on a lecture about respect for other people's property, while Richie sat and looked blankly respectful. "And so," he heard himself conclude, "I hope we'll be more careful in the future."

"Yes," said Richie.

A vague memory came to Jonathan and he sat and studied his son, remembering him when he was younger and first starting to talk. He recalled the time Richie, age three, had come bustling up to him. "Vransh!" the child had pleaded, tugging at his father's hand. Jonathan had gone outside with him to see a baby bird which had fallen from its nest. "Vransh!" Richie had crowed, exhibiting his find. "Vransh!"

"Do I get my spanking now?" asked Richie from the chair. His eyes were wide and watchful.

Jonathan tore his mind from still another recollection: the old joke about the man and woman who adopted a day-old French infant and then studied French so they would be able to understand their child when he began to talk. Maybe, thought Jonathan, it's no joke. Maybe there *is* a language—

"Spanking?" he repeated absentmindedly. He took a fresh pencil and pad of paper. "How would you like to help with something, Richie?"

The blue eyes watched carefully. "Before you spank me or after?"

"No spanking." Jonathan glanced at the Easton notes, vaguely aware that Richie had suddenly relaxed. "What I'm going to do," he went on, "is say some words. It'll be a kind of game. I'll say a word and then you say a word. You say the first word you think after you hear my word. Okay?" He cleared his throat. "Okay! The first word is—house."

"*My* house."

"Bird," said Jonathan.

"Uh—tree." Richie scratched his nose and stifled a yawn.

Disappointed, Jonathan reminded himself that Richie at six could not be expected to remember something he had said when he was three. "Dog."

"Biffy." Richie sat up straight. "Daddy, did you know Biffy had puppies? Steve's mother showed me. Biffy had four puppies, Daddy. *Four*!"

Jonathan nodded. He supposed Richie's next statement would be an appeal to go next door and negotiate for one of the pups, and he hurried on with, "Carooms."

"Friends," said Richie, eyes still shining. "Daddy, do you suppose we could have a pup—" He broke off at the look on Jonathan's face. "Huh?"

"Friends," repeated Jonathan, writing the word slowly and unsteadily. "Uh—vacation."

"Beach," said Richie cautiously, still looking scared.

Jonathan went on with more familiar terms and Richie slowly relaxed again in the big chair. From somewhere in the back of his mind, Jonathan heard Margery say, "Sometimes I think they're a different species altogether." He kept his voice low and casual, uncertain of what he was thinking, but aware of the fact that Richie was hiding something. The little mantel clock ticked drowsily, and Richie began to look sleepy and bored as they went through things like "car" and "school" and "book." Then—

"Friend," said Jonathan.

"Allavarg," yawned Richie. "No!" He snapped to, alert and wary. "I mean *Steve*."

His father looked up sharply. "What's that?"

"What?" asked Richie.

"Richie," said Jonathan, "what's a Caroom?"

The boy shrugged and muttered, "*I* dunno."

"Oh, yes, you do!" Jonathan lit a cigarette. "What's an Allavarg?" He watched the boy bite his lips and stare out the window. "He's a friend, isn't he?" coaxed Jonathan. "*Your* friend? Does he play with you?"

The blond head nodded slowly and uncertainly.

"Where does he live?" persisted Jonathan. "Does he come over here and play in your yard? Does he, Richie?"

The boy stared at his father, worried and unhappy. "Sometimes," he whispered. "Sometimes he does, if I call him."

"How do you call him?" asked Jonathan. He was beginning to feel foolish.

"Why," said Richie, "I just say 'Here, Allavarg!' and he comes, if he's not too busy."

"What keeps him busy?" Such nonsense! Allavarg was undoubtedly an imaginary playmate. This whole hunch of his was utter nonsense. He should be at work on Easton instead of—

"The nursery keeps him busy," said Richie. "Real busy."

Jonathan frowned. Did Richie mean the greenhouse down the road? Was there a Mr. Allavarg who worked there? "Whose nursery?"

"Ours." Richie wrinkled his face thoughtfully. "I think I better go outside and play."

"*Our* nursery?" Jonathan stared at his son. "Where is it?"

"I think I better go play," said Richie more firmly, sliding off the chair.

"Richard! *Where* is the nursery?"

The full lower lip began to tremble. "I can't tell you!" Richie wailed. "I promised!"

Jonathan slammed his fist on the desk. "Answer me!" He knew he shouldn't speak this way to Richie; he knew he was frightening the boy. But the ideas racing through his mind drove him to find out what this was all about. It might be nothing, but it also might be—"Answer me, Richard!"

The child stifled a sob. "Here," he said weakly.

"*Here*? Where?"

"In my house," said Richie. "And Steve's house and Billy's and all over." He rubbed his eyes, leaving a grimy smear.

"All right," soothed Jonathan. "It's all right now, son. Daddy didn't mean to scare you. Daddy has to learn these things, that's all. Just like learning in school."

The boy shook his head resentfully. "*You* know," he accused. "You just forgot."

"What did I forget, Richie?"

"You forgot all about Allavarg. He told me! It was a different Allavarg when you were little, but it was almost the same. You used to play with *your* Allavarg when you were little like me!"

Jonathan took a deep breath. "Where did Allavarg come from, Richie?"

But Richie shook his head stubbornly, lips pressed tight. "I promised!"

"Richie, a promise like that isn't a good one," pleaded Jonathan. "Allavarg wouldn't want you to disobey your father and mother, would he?"

The child sat and stared at him.

This was a very disturbing thought and Jonathan could see Richie did not know how to deal with it.

He pressed his momentary advantage. "Allavarg takes care of little boys and girls, doesn't he? He plays with them and he looks after them, I'll bet."

Richie nodded uncertainly.

"And," continued Jonathan, smiling what he hoped was a winning, comradely smile at his son, "I'll bet that Allavarg came from some place far, far away, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Richie softly.

"And it's his job to be here and look after the—the nursery?" Jonathan bit his lip. Nursery? Earth? Carooms—Martians? His head began to ache. "Son, you've got to help me understand. Do you—do you murv me?"

Richie shook his head. "No. But I *will* after—"

"After what?"

"After I grow up."

"Why not now?" asked Jonathan.

The blond head sank lower. "Because you framish, Daddy."

His father nodded, trying to look wise, wincing inwardly as he pictured his colleagues listening in on this conversation. "Well—why don't you help me so I *don't* framish?"

"I can't." Richie glanced up, his eyes stricken. "Some day, Allavarg says, *I'm* going to framish, too!"

"Grow up, you mean?" hazarded Jonathan, and this time his smile was real as he looked at the smudged eyes and soft round cheeks. "Why, Richie," he went on, his voice suddenly husky, "it's fun to be a little boy, but there'll be lots to do when you grow up. You—"

"I wish I was Mr. Easton!" Richie said fiercely.

Jonathan held his breath. "What about Mr. Easton?"

Richie squirmed out of the chair and clutched Jonathan's arm. "Please, Daddy! If you let Mr. Easton go back, can I go, too? Please? Can I?"

Jonathan put his hands on his son's shoulders. "Richie! What do you know about Mr. Easton?"

"Please? Can I go with him?" The shining blue eyes pleaded up at him. "If you don't let him go back pretty soon, he's going to framish again! Please! Can I?"

"He's going to framish," nodded Jonathan. "And what then?" he coaxed. "What'll happen after he framishes? Will he be able to tell me about his trip?"

"*I* dunno," said Richie. "I dunno how he *could*. After you framish, you don't remember lots of things. I don't think he's even gonna remember he *went* on a trip." The boy's hands shook Jonathan's arm eagerly. "Please, Daddy! Can I go with him?"

"No!" Jonathan glared and released his hold on Richie. Didn't he have troubles enough without Richie suggesting—"About the nursery," he said briskly. "Why is there a nursery?"

"To take care of us." Richie looked worried. "Why can't I go?"

"Because you can't! Why don't they have the nursery back where Allavarg came from?"

"There isn't any room." The blue eyes studied the man, looking for a way to get permission to go with Mr. Easton.

"No room? What do you mean?"

Richie sighed. Obviously he'd have to explain first and coax later. "Well,

you know my school? You know my teacher in school? You know when my teacher was different?" He peered anxiously at Jonathan, and suddenly the man caught on.

"Of course! You mean when they split the kindergarten into two smaller groups because there were too many—"

His voice trailed off. Too many. Too many what? Too many Martians on Mars? Growing population? No way to cut down the birth rate? He pictured the planet with too many people. What to do? Move out. Take another planet. Why didn't they just do that? He put the question to Richie.

"Oh," said his son wisely, "they couldn't because of the framish. They *did* go other places, but everywhere they went, they framished. And after you framish, you ain't—*aren't* a Caroom any more. You're a Gunderguck and of course—"

"Huh?"

"—and a Caroom doesn't like to framish and be a Gunderguck," continued Richie happily, as though reciting a lesson learned in school. "He wants to be a Caroom *all* the time because it's better and more fun and you know lots of things you don't remember after you get to be a Gunderguck. Only—" he paused for a gulp of air—"only there wasn't room for *all* the Carooms back home and they couldn't find any place where they could be Carooms all the time, because of the framish. So after a long time, and after they looked all over all around, they decided maybe it wouldn't be so bad if they sent some of their little boys and girls—the ones they didn't have room for—to some place where they could be Carooms longer than most other places. And *that* place," Richie said proudly, "was right here! 'Cause *here* there's almost as much gladdisl as back home and—"

"Gladdisl?" Jonathan echoed hoarsely. "What's—"

"—and after they start growing up—"

"Gladdisl," Jonathan repeated, more firmly. "Richie, what is it?"

The forehead puckered momentarily. "It's something you breathe, sort of." The boy shied away from the difficult question, trying to remember what Allavarg had said about gladdisl. "Anyway, after the little boys and girls start to grow up and after they framish and be Gundergucks, like you and Mommy, the Carooms back home send some *more* to take their places. And the Gundergucks who used to be Carooms here in the nursery look after the new little—"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Jonathan interrupted suspiciously. "I thought you said Allavarg looks after them."

"He does. But there's so many little Carooms and there aren't many Allavargs and so the Gundergucks have to help. You help," Richie assured his father. "You and Mommy help a little bit."

Big of you to admit it, old man, thought Jonathan, suppressing a smile. "But

aren't you *our* little boy?" he asked. He had a sudden vision of himself addressing the scientists at the Institute: "And so, gentlemen, our babies—who, incidentally, are really Martians—*are* brought by storks, after all. Except in those cases where—"

"The doctor brought me in a little black bag," said Richie.

The boy stood silent and studied his father. He sort of remembered what Allavarg had said, too. Things like You *mustn't ever tell* and *It's got to be a secret* and *They'd only laugh at you, Richie, and if they didn't laugh, they might believe you and try to go back home and there just isn't any room.*

"I think," said Richie, "I think I better—" He took a deep breath. "Here, Allavarg," he called in a soft, piping voice.

Jonathan raised his head. "Just what do you think you're doing—"

There was a sound behind him, and Jonathan turned startledly.

"Shame on you," said Allavarg, coming through the broken window.

Jonathan's words dropped away in a faint gurgle.

"I'm sorry," said Richie. "Don't be dipplefit."

"It's a mess," Allavarg replied. "It's a krandoor mess!" He waved his arm in the air over Jonathan's head. "And don't think I'm going to forget it!" The insistent hiss of escaping gas hovered over the moving pellet in his hand. "Jivis boy!"

Jonathan coughed suddenly. He got as far as "Now look here" and then found that he could neither speak nor move. The gas or whatever it was stung his eyes and burned in his throat.

"Why don't you just freeble him?" Richie asked unhappily. "You're using up all your gladdisl! Why don't you freeble him and get me another one?"

"Freeble, breeble," grumbled Allavarg, shoving the capsule directly under Jonathan's nose. "Just like you youngsters, always wanting to take the easy way out! Gundergucks don't grow on blansercots, you know."

Jonathan felt tears start in his eyes, partly from the fumes and partly from a growing realization that Allavarg was sacrificing precious air for him. He tried to think. If this was gladdisl and if this would keep a man in the state of being a Caroom, then—

"There," said Allavarg, looking unhappily at the emptied pellet. He shook it, sniffed it and finally returned it to the container at his side.

"I'm sorry," Richie whispered. "But he kept askin' me and askin' me."

"There, there," said Allavarg, going to the window. "Don't fret. I know you won't do it again." He turned and looked thoughtfully at Jonathan. He winked at Richie and then he was gone.

Jonathan rubbed his eyes. He could move now. He opened his mouth and

waggled his jaws. Now that the room was beginning to be cleared of the gas, he realized that it had had a pleasant odor. He realized—

Why, it was all so simple! Remembering his sessions with Easton, Jonathan laughed aloud. So simple! The message? *Stay away from Mars! No room there! They said I could come back if I gave you the message, but I have to come back alone because there's no room for more people!*

No room? Nonsense! Jonathan reached for the phone, dialled the Institute and asked for Dr. Stoughton. No room? On the paradise that was Mars? Well, they'd just have to make room! They couldn't keep that to themselves!

"Hello, Fred?" He leaned back in his chair, feeling a surge of pride and power. Wait till they heard about this! "Just wanted to tell you I solved the Easton thing. Just a simple case of hapsodon. You see, Allavarg came and gave me a tressimox of gladdisl and now that I'm a Caroom again—What? What do you mean, what's the matter? I said I'm not a Gunderguck any more." He stared at the phone. "Why, you spebberset moron! What's the matter with you? Don't you blikkel English?"

From the depths of the big chair across the room, Richie giggled.